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EVANGELICAL IMMIGRATION **table.**

An Evangelical Immigration Agenda for the 117th Congress and the New Administration

Since 2012, the Evangelical Immigration Table has advocated for immigration reforms consistent with biblical principles, guided by a statement that has been affirmed by a broad range of evangelical denominational leaders, Christian college and seminary presidents, parachurch ministry leaders and thousands of local pastors throughout the United States. Specifically, the [Evangelical Statement of Principle for Immigration Reform](#) calls for bipartisan immigration reform that:

- Respects the God-given dignity of every person
- Protects the unity of the immediate family
- Respects the rule of law
- Guarantees secure national borders
- Ensures fairness to taxpayers
- Establishes a path toward legal status and/or citizenship for those who qualify and who wish to become permanent residents

In 2019, the Evangelical Immigration Table published an e-book, [Thinking Biblically about Immigrants and Immigration Reform](#), that elaborates on each of these six foundational principles from a biblical perspective. Over the years, the leadership of the Evangelical Immigration Table has issued [letters and statements](#) on particular immigration actions and policy concerns, rooted in these principles, including releasing an [Evangelical Call for Restitution-Based Immigration Reform](#), clarifying the call for Congress to establish an earned legalization process that would both respect the rule of law and keep families together.

As a new Congress and a new presidential administration will be sworn in in January 2021, the Evangelical Immigration Table offers several key policy recommendations, guided by our biblical principles.

We Urge Republicans, Democrats and Independents in the 117th Congress to Work Together To:

- **Create a solution for Dreamers to apply for permanent legal status and citizenship.** We recognize that Dreamers are a special category of immigrants because they arrived as children, and our laws should not hold children responsible for decisions which were made by others on their behalf. How we treat this category of immigrants is therefore not just a policy or political issue; it is a moral issue. We believe our government should provide a pathway to permanent legal status and eventual citizenship for eligible Dreamers without penalty.

- **Pass a Restitution-Based Immigration Reform** that would allow other immigrants who are present in the U.S. unlawfully – who entered as adults – to earn Lawful Permanent Resident status if they first pay a significant fine, in recognition of and restitution for their violation of immigration law. Such an earned legalization process, outlined in an [Evangelical Call for Restitution-Based Immigration Reform](#), would avoid the extremes of either an amnesty policy – which would simply forgive the offense of having either overstayed a visa or entered the country unlawfully, undermining the rule of law – or a mass deportation policy, which would divide many families and be economically and logistically impractical. Such a proposal should also address future immigration dynamics by investing in effective border security and modernizing legal immigration processes so they are more orderly, efficient and humane, making illegal immigration more difficult while facilitating legal immigration, including for close relatives of U.S. citizens and Lawful Permanent Residents, for the essential workers upon whom our national economy relies and for some of the most vulnerable individuals seeking refuge from persecution.
- **Reintroduce and pass the Adoptee Citizenship Act**, a bipartisan bill that would correct an oversight in existing law. Under the Child Citizenship Act of 2000, most children adopted from foreign countries by U.S. citizen parents are guaranteed U.S. citizenship, but an estimated 35,000 adoptees who were already 18 years or older when this law went into effect were not included. As a result, though children of U.S. citizen parents, these individuals lack the benefits of U.S. citizenship and could even be subject to deportation. The Adoptee Citizenship Act should be passed to rectify this situation and provide clarity of legal status and citizenship to these individuals.
- **Appropriate funding necessary to facilitate legal immigration processes, to ensure border security and to address the root causes that fuel emigration.** In particular, Congress should:
 - Ensure that the United States Citizenship & Immigration Services can appropriately adjudicate lawful immigration requests in a timely manner.
 - Ensure that Customs and Border Protection has adequate resources to apprehend or deter individuals seeking to enter the United States unlawfully, to treat humanely those in its custody and to efficiently process travelers, immigrants and asylum seekers at lawful ports of entry.
 - Enable the U.S. Government to robustly resume the overseas processing and vetting of refugees and the resettlement of refugees within the U.S., in partnership with faith-based and non-profit organizations.
 - Fund additional immigration judges to restore due process protections and significantly reduce the years-long backlog for asylum cases and other immigration court cases.
 - Reinstate the immigration family case management program to facilitate legal proceedings, protect the rights of migrant families and alleviate incarceration and potential family separations at the border.
 - Ensure that the Department of Health and Human Services has adequate capacity to humanely care for unaccompanied children who are placed into its temporary care and quickly reunify them with their own families.
 - Strengthen the capacity of the U.S. Agency for International Development and its partners, including faith-based organizations, to address the root causes that lead many people to make the difficult decision to emigrate, including extreme poverty, violence, corruption and

environmental degradation in foreign countries, along with communication efforts to educate those abroad about eligibility for asylum under U.S. law.

We Urge the Biden Administration To:

- **Play a proactive role in forging an American consensus on immigration reform**, fulfilling the president-elect's campaign commitment to pursue legislation within the first 100 days of the new administration to allow undocumented immigrants to earn legal status and eventual citizenship. The administration should consult with both Republican and Democratic Members of Congress as well as the constituencies who are directly impacted by U.S. immigration policies.
- **Rebuild the U.S. refugee resettlement program** by setting the annual refugee ceiling at a higher level consistent with the resettlement program's history, such as the proposed 125,000 ceiling to which the president-elect has already committed. We affirm the importance of a strong, timely vetting process to ensure that those admitted as refugees to the U.S. meet the legal requirements and do not present a public safety or public health risk to the United States. A return to a robust refugee resettlement program will allow the U.S. to once again offer safety and religious freedom to those persecuted for their faith, including but not limited to persecuted Christians, as well as to those persecuted for other reasons.
- **Restore the asylum system**, ensuring that the U.S. respects its own laws and commitments to offer protection to those who reach the United States and demonstrate a credible fear of persecution for reasons outlined in U.S. law. The administration should end the "Migrant Protection Protocols," which have required asylum seeking families, including many children, to be kept in dangerous settings with minimal access to due process. Instead, the administration should utilize alternatives to detention including family case management, allowing those who pass a preliminary credible fear interview and who do not pose a threat to public safety to reside with family members while awaiting court hearings, rather than being detained at taxpayer expense. Restoring the asylum process also means immediately resuming asylum processing, which has been halted along the country's borders under Title 42, and reversing recent regulatory changes that have narrowed eligibility for asylum and denied protection to many deserving applicants, violating the spirit and in some cases the letter of the Refugee Act of 1980.
- **Extend Temporary Protected Status (TPS)** to individuals from Venezuela, and grant or extend TPS for those from other countries faced with political or natural disasters. The administration should also renew TPS for long-term beneficiaries and support legislative efforts to allow them to earn permanent legal status.
- **Protect vulnerable children** by complying fully with relevant provisions of the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act and the Homeland Security Act. The administration should prioritize the reunification of any children and parents who remain separated as a result of the previous administration's "zero tolerance" policy. Additionally, the administration should fully respect the terms of the *Flores* settlement agreement, ensuring that children are held in the least restrictive setting and allowed to remain safely with their parent(s) except in the most rare of circumstances. It should also resume the Central American Minor program to provide a lawful, orderly process for qualifying children

of a parent residing lawfully in the U.S. to be reunited to their family without the risks of a dangerous journey to the U.S. border.

- **Facilitate legal immigration processes**, including immediately re-opening overseas visa processing from all countries of origin. Qualifying family members should be reunified with their U.S. citizen and Lawful Permanent Resident relatives as expeditiously as the law allows. Regulations that redefine a significant share of family-sponsored immigrants as a “public charge” should be reversed. The United States Citizenship & Immigration Services should efficiently adjudicate valid requests for immigration benefits without unnecessarily burdensome application processes and should reconsider fee increases that present a barrier to legal immigration. The administration should also roll back restrictive guidance on international student, religious worker and other work visa categories, reestablishing a welcoming environment for international talent that benefits the country, now and in the future.

As Christian leaders, we commit to:

- **Pray** for each Senator, Representative and the President, as well as his cabinet and the staff who support these leaders, consistent with the Apostle Paul’s instruction to pray for “all those in authority” (1 Timothy 2:2). We pray that all our leaders will put the well-being of our country above partisan politics.
- **Exhort those under our spiritual leadership to approach both the immigrants in their communities and congregations and questions of immigration policy in ways guided by the Bible**, providing opportunities and resources for discipleship rooted in God’s love for all people.
- **Encourage our churches, campuses and organizations to welcome newly arrived immigrants and refugees into our communities**, offering tangible assistance as churches and other faith-based institutions have done throughout our history.

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The [Evangelical Immigration Table](#) is a broad coalition of evangelical organizations and leaders advocating for immigration reform consistent with biblical values. Leadership organizations include Bethany Christian Services, the Council for Christian Colleges & Universities, the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, Faith & Community Empowerment, the National Association of Evangelicals, the National Latino Evangelical Coalition, the Wesleyan Church, World Relief and World Vision.