

from our viewpoint...

Immigration change has to happen soon

President Bush wants to do something about the immigration system, which is so not working.

The president is ready to propose a "guest worker" program to allow hundreds of thousands of foreign nationals to work and live legally in this country.

It has to happen. The present system is way beyond repair, and we need to start over if we want this country to prosper. Our economy can't grow without foreign workers.

Since the 1960s, U.S. immigration policy has granted the right to come here only to skilled works, professionals such as doctors and technicians, those who were deemed worthy of allowing in.

Basically, we tried to shut our doors to foreign laborers, but it has not worked. The problem is economic: There are thousands of workers who want to come to this country because there are thousands of jobs here for them.

It's impossible, given the situation, to keep them out. No amount of money spent on border enforcement seems to work. And as long as the jobs and the money are here, people will find a way to come.

By the turn of the century, in fact, one in seven workers in this country was an alien. In "entry-level" jobs, the ones that pay the least and are hardest to fill, the figure was more like one in five.

Immigrants take jobs on road crews, in packing plants, in fields, in factories, that most Americans won't consider. But to keep the economy rolling, someone has to do the work.

All the present system has done is force the immigrant labor pool underground, where the workers don't pay taxes, buy insurance for their cars, or contribute to our society. Though most would gladly pay their share, we won't let them.

Worse yet, the undocumented labor pool creates a vast underground of illegals, a shadow world where terrorists might be able to move at will. Secretary of Homeland Security Tom Ridge has said as much. He's among those in the administration pushing for reform.

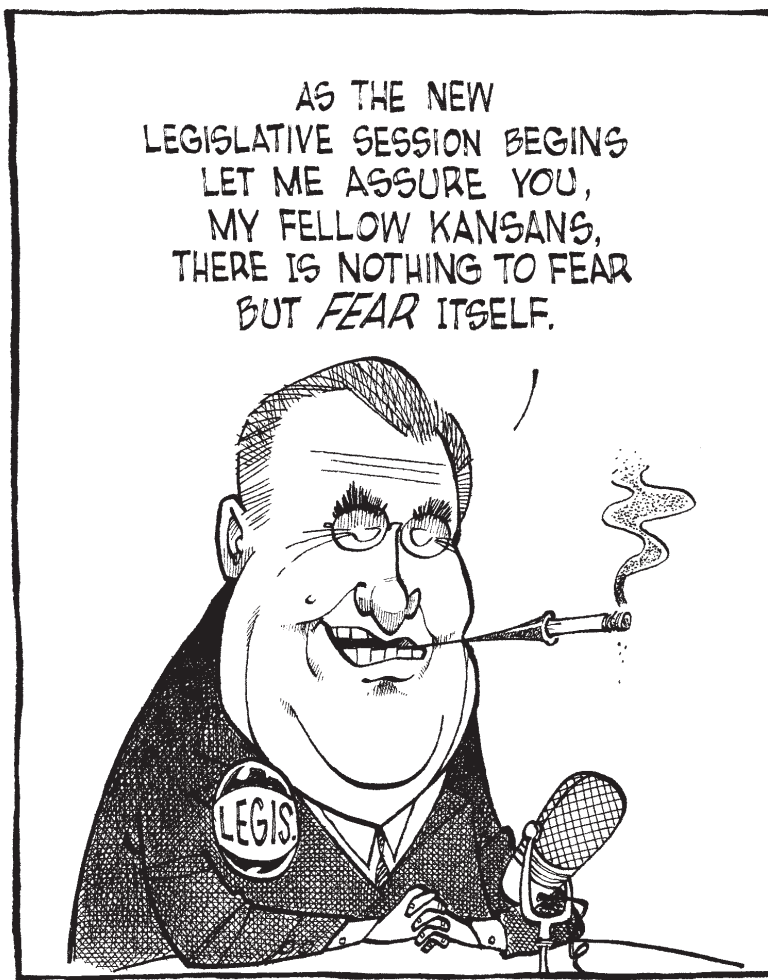
Allowing guest workers to be legal has many advantages. One proposal is to let them collect Social Security, but only if they return to their own country. Legal workers would be able to get driver's licenses and have car insurance. As it stands today, most state's won't let illegals be licensed. They are forced to drive without a license or insurance.

Legal immigrants will be "on the radar screen" for police and security officials, and that will make Ridge feel better.

Experts predict that reforms may take years to get through Congress, though. The issue is considered "radioactive" on Capitol Hill because of the high emotion it generates.

Some proposals, such as a plan to have a commission to regulate where workers could go and what jobs they could take, will drop away. The old policy shows the utter failure of attempts to regulate workers. It will take time to hash these things out.

But the current situation is intolerable, and the sooner we set about making it work, the better. — Steve Haynes



This was my most relaxing Christmas

I don't know about you, but this past Christmas was probably the most relaxing I've experienced since childhood. And quite possibly, more relaxing than childhood ones; anticipation for Christmas was pretty stressful when I was little.

Why was this Christmas so different? Let me list the ways:

1. Gifts to my family were basically all the same. I gave them a copy of a book I put together of my weekly newspaper columns.
2. A niece went to the store, ordered my Christmas cards for me, and then picked them up. All I had to do was put them in envelopes and address. Oh yes, I went to the post office to buy the stamps and later to mail them.
3. Advent Season (the four weeks before Christmas) was a true joy. My church decorated the sanctuary one of the Sundays during worship, the choir sang a beautiful cantata on another Sunday, the youth choirs presented a Christmas program on the third Sunday, so I was responsible for one sermon to immediately



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precede Christmas and to tie up together the whole theme.

4. Christmas Eve was special with carols and candle lighting. We prepared for 85 people and had 130 attend!
5. My sister drove in to share the holiday with me.
6. After church we went to a niece's home and visited and laughed with her, her fiancée and all her to-be-in-laws.
7. I opened my Christmas gifts from family and friends. (My sister would open hers later with her family.) People are always so thoughtful. My sister said, "They really take good care of you, don't they?" I had to agree; I am blessed.

8. Christmas morning we slept until ready to get up. And I didn't even get out of my gown and robe all day long! (I can't remember when I last had a day like that). We didn't turn the TV on all day. We didn't even cook — except to make our mother's favorite dessert — caramel dumplings. We had purchased Chinese food the day before and that was our Christmas dinner (definitely a new tradition).

9. For two days we talked, looked at photo albums, talked, laughed, put together jigsaw puzzles, talked and finished up the Chinese food.

10. All of our children called at some point during the two days, so we were able to share in their holidays, too.

So it was a truly relaxing Christmas season. My sister nostalgically summed it up: "All our married life, this is the kind of Christmas that my husband really wanted. I guess I'm finally old enough to want it, too."

I think we've stumbled onto something. "Simplify. Simplify. Simplify."

Best immigration reform would help all

It was just past the lunch rush and I was waiting for a table at an Italian chain restaurant in Indianapolis. A neatly dressed black man in his 20s approached the host. He asked if the restaurant had any job openings in the kitchen. "Do you speak Spanish?" the host asked.

"No," the man answered, obviously flustered.

"All of our kitchen staff must speak Spanish," the host told the man, then he added that a nearby restaurant was hiring.

Since when does speaking Spanish have anything to do with making quasi-Italian food? I spent lunch trying to guess the rationale. A language requirement clearly would lessen chaos in the already chaotic restaurant kitchen. Insisting upon one language makes sense.

But why not English? Most Hoosiers speak only one language, and that's English. Then it hit me: Perhaps this requirement is filtering out the undesirables.

Chat with those who employ low-skill workers, and you'll get an earful. Employees who feign illness the day before or after the weekend. Employees who cannot figure out how to show up when they lack a reliable car. Employees who don't use an alarm clock. Employees who think their presence is effort enough. Employees who try to get fired once they're eligible for unemployment payments.

Mexicans have a reputation for working extremely hard. If they don't have a car, they'll get to work on foot or on a bike. Establishing Spanish fluency as a job requirement is one way to bypass those people who work the system, and instead hire those who work, period.

Who could blame the restaurant? I don't. This restaurant and other businesses have work to do. Unfortunately, some Americans are unwilling to do a good job.

President Bush's proposal to ease requirements for illegal immigrants — read Mexicans — only addresses part of our immigration problems.



liberterian writers bureau

sheri conover sharlow

The problem is that we're rewarding people for breaking the law, which is always a bad idea. Those who play by the rules shouldn't be watching others leapfrog past them. We need to make immigration easier for all immigrants, regardless of home country. (I will make a grudging nod to wariness after the 9/11 massacres.) The United States has more than enough land and jobs that are tough to fill, enough to allow more immigration.

The problem is that we need people in specialty areas. Just try to hire doctors in the smaller cities in fly-over country, and you'll appreciate why under-50,000 cities like Marion, Ind., have a large percentage of foreign-born physicians.

The problem is that offering welfare and other benefits to unproductive people encourages unproductive people to come here.

The problem is that the Immigration and Naturalization Service is stretched way too thin from the 9/11 fallout to handle concerns about legal immigration. While understandable, it's inexcusable, especially when you consider the huge fees paid by those who play by the rules.

The problem is that our immigration policies are not driven by what's fairest or best, but by political ramifications. Bush and Democrats are catering to Hispanics because they a big voting bloc on the horizon. Immigrants from other countries are treated as an afterthought.

My Canadian friends go to extremes to support the locally owned businesses in Marion, Ind. They have become active members of our church and its efforts to help the community.

She prepares dinners for sick neighbors, even when her fibromyalgia is flaring up.

What thanks do they get? A comedy of errors and incompetence made getting a driver's license annoyingly difficult. The nature of the work-visa program means she cannot work legally. Their paperwork at INS is years behind, making them wonder if their visa renewal could fall through. She's so uncertain that she hesitates to remodel her kitchen.

If we want to address real immigration problems, let's offer real solutions.

Make it easier to immigrate legally. Put more staff in the immigration offices so they can help all immigrants, not just those who are politically useful. End government benefits to non-citizens so only productive people will be rewarded for coming here.

Those who come to our country to work hard and reap their rewards have already passed the most important citizenship test. They have turned the American Dream into reality.

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