

Immigration Reform 2005

Try conducting a google search for immigration reform. My computer took 0.17 seconds to find 1,720,000 hits for [immigration reform](#). It seems everyone has an opinion on this issue. There seems to be very little middle ground...you're either for it or against it. But like so many other issues, the details are important. As we begin the 109th Congress, I urge you to review the legislative proposals and let your organization know your thoughts pertaining to reform.

President Bush has put forth several basic principles of immigration reform:

- **Protecting the Homeland by Controlling Our Borders:** The program should link to efforts to control our border through agreements with countries whose nationals participate in the program. It must support ongoing efforts to enhance homeland security.
- **Serve America's Economy by Matching a Willing Worker with a Willing Employer:** When no American worker is available and willing to take a job, the program should provide a labor supply for American employers. It should do so in a way that is clear, streamlined, and efficient so people can find jobs and employers can find workers in a timely manner.
- **Promoting Compassion:** The program should grant currently working undocumented aliens a temporary worker status to prevent exploitation. Participants would be issued a temporary worker card that will allow them to travel back and forth between their home and the U.S. without fear of being denied re-entry into America.
- **Providing Incentives for Return to Home Country:** The program will require the return of temporary workers to their home country after their period of work has concluded. The legal status granted by this program would last three years, be renewable, and would have an end. During the temporary work period, it should allow movement across the U.S. borders so the worker can maintain roots in their home country.
- **Protecting the Rights of Legal Immigrants:** The program should not connect participation to a green card or citizenship. However, it should not preclude a participant from obtaining green card status through the existing process. It should not permit undocumented workers to gain an advantage over those who have followed the rules.

- **Temporary Worker Program**

President Bush does not support amnesty because individuals who violate America's laws should not be rewarded for illegal behavior and because amnesty perpetuates illegal immigration. The President proposes that the Federal Government offer temporary worker status to undocumented men and women now employed in the United States and to those in foreign countries who have been offered employment here. The workers under temporary status must pay a one-time fee to register in the program, abide by the rules, and return home after their period of work expires. There would be an opportunity for renewal. In the future, only people outside the U.S. may join the temporary worker program, and there will be an orderly system in place to address the needs of workers and companies.

- **American Workers Come First:** Employers must make every reasonable effort to find an American to fill a job before extending job offers to foreign workers.
- **Workplace Enforcement of Immigration Laws:** Enforcement against companies that break the law and hire illegal workers will increase.
- **Economic Incentives to Return Home:** The U.S. will work with other countries to allow aliens working in the U.S. to receive credit in their nations' retirement systems and will support the creation of tax-preferred savings accounts they can collect when they return to their native countries.
- **Fair and Meaningful Citizenship Process:** Some temporary workers will want to remain in America and pursue citizenship. They should not receive an unfair

advantage over those who have followed the law, and they will need to be placed in line for citizenship behind those who are already in line. Those who choose the path of citizenship will have an obligation to learn the facts and ideals that have shaped America's history.

- **Reasonable Annual Increase of Legal Immigrants:** A reasonable increase in the annual limit of legal immigrants will benefit those who follow the lawful path to citizenship.

- **Benefits to America of the Temporary Worker Program**
 - A more prosperous economy -- for America. The program would allow workers to find jobs and employers to find workers, quickly and simply.
 - A more secure homeland -- to improve the efficiency and management of all people who cross our borders. It is in the interest of the Nation, and each community, to identify foreign visitors and immigrants and make clear the nature of their intentions.
 - A more compassionate system -- to protect all workers in America with labor laws, the right to change jobs, fair wages, and a healthy work environment.

- **Homeland Security and Border Enforcement**
 - Border Patrol has increased from a strength of 9,788 on September 11, 2001 to 10,835 on December 1, 2003. Between ports of entry on the northern border, the size of the Border Patrol has tripled to more than 1,000 agents. In addition, the Border Patrol is continuing installation of monitoring devices along the borders to detect illegal activity.
 - The Bush Administration's Operation Tarmac was launched to investigate businesses and workers in the secure areas of domestic airports and ensure immigration law compliance. Since 9/11, DHS has audited 3,640 businesses, examined 259,037 employee records, arrested 1,030 unauthorized workers, and participated in the criminal indictment of 774 individuals.
 - President Bush announced the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS), an internet-based system that is improving America's ability to track and monitor foreign students and exchange visitors. Over 870,000 students are registered in SEVIS. Of 285 completed field investigations, 71 aliens were arrested.
 - This week, the US-VISIT program began to digitally collect biometric identifiers to record the entry and exit of aliens who travel into the U.S on a visa. Together with the standard information, this new program will confirm compliance with visa and immigration policies.

For the most part these broad concepts are very good; however, the legislation that must be enacted by Congress to put these principles into law will be complicated. As I stated earlier-the devil is often in the detail. Florida Farm Bureau labor advisory committee and staff have discussed these issues at length and will continue to follow the development of reform legislation during this congress. Our current policy on legal foreign workers is:

The use of legal foreign workers needs to be simplified and cost-competitive to make their employment more feasible for perishable crops. (LABOR)

You can bet that Florida Farm Bureau will be involved on the behalf of our members.

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