

Illegal Immigration

There have been a lot of discussions about the Illegal Immigration problem in California. It seems that both the Republican and Democratic administrations are unwilling to stop it. The problem is not new; it has been going on for years if not decades. Both sides point fingers at each other. The Left says that business wants to exploit cheap labor, while the Right says it is to get votes of the poor immigrants who tend to vote Democratic. What is the real story?

The Mexican government has been a corrupt single party system up until Fox's National Action Party, or PAN won office in July 2000. The Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) held a monopoly on power in Mexico for 71 years until Fox won the presidency, riding a wave of popular disgust at the PRI's corruption and abuses of power. Fox took office promising to make Mexico an international leader in human rights, vowing in his inaugural address to "protect them as never before, to respect them as never before." Unfortunately, the old party still controls its congress and Fox has not been able to make any reforms. The results have been a battered and a weak economy with climbing unemployment. Lawmakers have criticized Fox and his administration for promising jobs, higher wages and an immigration accord with the United States - then failing to deliver. His support has faded as hundreds of thousands of workers have lost their jobs in the soft economy.

On July 2, 2006 Mexican citizens voted for a president and members of congress. After an official vote count, Mexico's Federal Electoral Institute (IFE) gave victory to National Action Party candidate Felipe Calderón.

Just like Fox, Calderón needs to have a way to keep the lid on the situation. Calderón's political survival, as well as his party, lies in the United States, by far Mexico's largest trading partner. A major part of that is immigration. Because of this, Calderón's like Fox wants to make the transit for illegal migrants safer. He bitterly opposes the U.S. practice of having border patrol agents keep Mexican workers out of the United States, and envisions the day when people and goods flow freely across the border.

Up until the World Trade Center disaster President Bush was proposing another amnesty program for illegal immigrants already living in the United States and a guest worker program. Undoubtedly both past and present administrations have recognized the precarious state of the Mexican government and were unwilling to have an unstable government on the border. Past administrations have chosen either to not enforce the immigration laws or pass their own amnesty programs, providing Mexico with a safety net.

But this and illegal immigration comes with a price. There are between 10 and 20 million illegal immigrants living in the United States. Over two million of these are living in California. What we are doing is importing poverty at the same time exporting low skill jobs to foreign countries.

California bears a huge cost to provide basic human services for this fast growing, low-income segment of its population. A new study from the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) examines the costs of education, health care and incarceration of illegal aliens, and concludes that the costs to Californians is \$10.5 billion per year, about one third of the State's deficit.

This is not the only impact to the economy. Dollar remittances from Mexican workers living in the U.S. continue to increase at a record pace in spite of weakness in the U.S. economy, according to statistics released by the Bank of Mexico. It is estimated that the remittance has reached over \$10 billion in 2006. Mexicans living in the US have sent \$80 billion to Mexico over the last 20 years. The transfers are Mexico's second largest source of income behind oil exports. Is it any wonder that Mexico supports unrestricted immigration? Remember this is money not spent in the United States.

Immigration is the driving force behind rapid population growth. Immigration currently accounts for 37 percent of U.S. population growth. It has a negative impact on lower-skilled, less-educated Americans and is exacerbating the wealth gap. Current immigration is driving down earnings for low-wage workers. The minimum wage is supposed to protect these workers from unfair competition rather than exposing them to it. It would be callous and irresponsible to suggest that the economic advantage that the well-off receive from the wage depressing effects of the current immigration should have priority over the economic hardship this produces for the less fortunate. Unless something is done the losers may be the less-skilled domestic workers who compete with immigrants and whose wages will fall.

There is also a non economic impact to unrestricted immigration. People who live in areas where there are already large concentrations of immigrants are concerned about their school budgets, the quality of education of their children, and about the impact on municipal services and crime rates. Twenty five percent of the people in our jails are illegal immigrants.

Why do the Mexicans want to come to the United States? That's simple. For a better life. The average annual income of Mexicans living in the U.S. stood at \$28,818 last year, compared to Mexico's meager \$5,894 per capita income. In addition, income distribution among Mexicans living in the U.S. is significantly better than in Mexico. They get free medical and schooling for their children.

One last point needs to be made, the political impact as a result of this large flux of illegal immigration. Fox encourages it in hopes to influence US policies. Already, you can see the impact with both parties pursuing the Mexican vote.

Don't get me wrong, we are a nation of immigrants. Immigration is important to the growth of the United States. Immigration needs to be structured based upon the need. The majority of the newcomers should be admitted on the basis of their being able to contribute to the high-skills, high-wage economy that we want for the 21st century. The immigration of unskilled and uneducated should be limited.