

Leo Martinez, a former member of the Lincoln County Commission in New Mexico, wrote the following commentary. He campaigned in 2002 as a Republican candidate for the District 2 Congressional seat. He was the first Hispanic during the 20th century to be elected to the Santa Barbara, California City Council in 1973. Martinez now resides in Ruidoso, New Mexico, where he is a small business owner.

A FAIR GUEST WORKER PROGRAM IS NEEDED

Undocumented immigration into the United States needs to be resolved once and for all for those already here as well as future undocumented workers. In the short time left before election ballots are cast, we need to ask congressional members and candidates where they stand on undocumented worker, border security, and most importantly, a fair guest worker program.

We have roughly 17 million undocumented workers in the United States. Many of them came here to make a better life for themselves, such as my father who crossed the border from Mexico as a child in the early 1920's. He was always employed and paid his fair share of taxes, raised a family of six children and never went on welfare or unemployment benefits. He did not become a U.S. citizen because he could not read or write English, however, he proudly carried his "green card."

We are a country of laws but when it comes to the faceless 17 million undocumented workers, it is easier for our leaders in Washington to brush aside the law and declare amnesty to solve the undocumented worker problem. President Ronald Reagan's immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986 declared amnesty for undocumented workers as a one-time deal. Since then we have spent billions and still have not been successful in securing our borders nor devising a long-term solution to the undocumented worker problem. We have not been able to stem the tide of undocumented worker that is washing over our nation's borders. A fair guest worker program would be far better than what we now have, which is basically an **open border** in spite of Border Patrol efforts and taxpayer funding to the tune of millions of dollars.

When I wrote this commentary back in 2002, I had found that many people, including myself, did not support then President Bush's amnesty proposal for undocumented workers who were presently residing in the United States. Many of us were of the opinion that a blanket

amnesty would not be fair to those who have previously abided by the law to gain legal entry and status. What signal would blanket amnesty send to future undocumented workers? Sure, come on over, hide out, get cash jobs to avoid paying taxes, be on the public trough – another president will soon give you amnesty. Many folks agree with my position that a fair guest worker program would employ people in jobs undesired by U.S. citizens, bring needed tax dollars into federal and state educational, health, and welfare programs, and create documentation of the whereabouts and employment status of undocumented workers through the use of a tamper-proof worker identification card.

Let's not pretend that we do not need the undocumented workers who are already living in every part of our nation, far beyond those states bordering Mexico. We need undocumented workers to do the jobs that our own citizens will not do, while they need jobs to provide for their families. Our national economy would come to a grinding halt if we sent all these workers back to their place of origin. Who would provide the labor to pick field crops; work in the oil fields, construction sites, ranches, restaurants and motels; and provide childcare and gardening services? Our citizens refuse all these jobs because there is more money to be made at the welfare trough.

In order to come up with a solution we must first admit that we need these folks. Then we must come up with a fair guest worker program that would allow for eventual green card status and application for citizenship-but only if they prove their ability to maintain employment and not be on welfare or involved with criminal activities. With a fair guest worker program workers and businesses alike would not have to look over their shoulders for **La Migra**, thus freeing the Border Patrol to concentrate on undocumented workers who seek to do our country harm.

We are a nation that can send a man to the moon and back; surely we can figure out a means of a tamper-proof immigrant worker card. It could be renewed annually depending on the need for workers in the United States and the employment (not welfare) status of the individual. A temporary social security number issued to undocumented workers would contribute to the tax structure that provides for the educational and health services that undocumented workers are legally entitled to use.

Think about those who have come here legally and pay their fair share of taxes. Many of them are worse off financially than undocumented workers because they do pay taxes. Is it fair to them to give blanket amnesty AGAIN to undocumented workers? I think not and many legal documented workers agree that there should be a fair guest worker program that applauds those who came here legally, while allowing undocumented workers the opportunity to gain legal status.

Mexico and other participating countries should not be left out of the equation as they bear responsibility to their citizens. The countries from which undocumented workers come have an obligation to contribute funds for the implementation of a fair guest worker program. A fair guest worker program would go a long way towards our relationship with Mexico and resolve a longstanding immigration problem that for some reason seems to elude us. A fair guest worker program will work!

It is time that we stop the senseless deaths of so many undocumented workers crossing the deadly southwest deserts either on foot or by truck when their only crime is that of wanting to work at jobs that our citizens don't want. It is also time to stop the desecration of our national monuments as well as the trashing of private ranch lands that are being used as temporary camps by thousands of undocumented workers on their way to the "Promised Land."

The Latino population is not homogeneous in it's thinking; our individuals have differing thoughts on any particular issue, just as is found in any other group of people. I think of those individuals who have worked long and hard, making personal sacrifices to be here legally- what about them? I also think that those who do not want to hide in the shadows, but are here undocumented- should be given the chance to contribute to their communities through the paying of taxes. They are already here, folks.

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