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## Ambrose: How illegal immigrants hurt the poor

By Jay Ambrose  
Scripps Howard News Service

President Bush proposes that we allow most of the 11 million illegal aliens in the country to stay, and he also wants a guest worker program. Why?

Does he also want still more unemployment among the nation's least educated, most impoverished young people, and still lower wages? Does he want to continue widening the gap between rich and poor here? Does he want to go on inflicting pain and exploitation on the illegal workers themselves?

The president's idea of temporarily rotating 6,000 members of the National Guard to border duty may prove useful, and will certainly send a signal that the United States is getting more serious about the constant assault on our democratically derived immigration laws. Even if it is more for show than a long-term solution, this action appears on the right track.

And Bush is on the right track in wanting to get tougher with employers who knowingly hire illegal aliens, though he does not seem to be willing to get tough enough. There may be merit to his notion of having an ID card for foreign workers, but let's don't suppose that a great many employers are in ignorance of what they are doing right now, or that it would be an overwhelming feat to catch many of them if the government makes up its mind to do so.

The really, truly difficult issue is what to do about the millions of illegal aliens living in the country at this moment with no intention of departing. Many have been here for years and have families and roots in their communities, as the president said. They are roughly equivalent in number to the population of the state of Ohio. You can't just go out and round them up and ship all of them away in a week or two or three, or even a year or two or three.

But we should remember, too, that we had an amnesty program in the 1980s, and the number of illegal aliens living in this country has tripled since then. Letting the illegals get in line for citizenship as Bush suggests might well send a message that if you can sneak in and hide out for a while, you can be a citizen, too. Can we can get so good at guarding the border that we can prevent aliens from sneaking in if such an incentive is left in place? Probably not. There is perplexity enough here to choke a think tank, but it does not follow that the issue is unsolvable -- that there is no humane, practical way out better than what Bush has suggested.



Jay Ambrose

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As for guest workers, forget it, at least on any major scale. Yes, there may be some places where great hardship would be worked without them, such as picking lettuce in California, but it has by now been amply demonstrated that it is by and large a fiction that Americans won't take the jobs that illegal aliens are taking.

In fact, scholars such as Andrew Sum of Northeastern University in Boston have shown that illegal aliens are increasing unemployment among our poorest citizens. They are also depressing wages, and what we're ending up with among the illegals themselves is the growth of an exploited, impoverished class that widens the gap between rich and poor. On top of that, they consume far more in public services than are matched by the taxes they pay.

Liberals ought to unite with conservatives on this. If they do care about the native poor and the exploited aliens, if they get it that the competitive advantage of the United States resides in increasing the numbers of skilled workers, not unskilled workers, and if they can get past the stupidity that anyone who wants to fix this thing is a racist and a xenophobe, they should join with those who are already speaking out forcibly and help make ours a stronger, better land.

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