

Immigration Reform the Domestic Focus for President Bush

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U.S. President George Bush is on a two-day swing through Arizona and Texas to build support for his immigration reform package. The President wants to crack down on illegal immigrants but lawmakers are divided on how to do it.

In the state of Arizona, where U.S. border patrol guards face a daily battle with fence jumpers and illegal crossings, President Bush repeated a pledge to protect America's borders. "Securing our border is essential to securing the homeland."

Speaking to border guards and customs officials at an Air Force hangar in Tucson, Arizona, President Bush outlined his plan to overhaul the country's immigration system by increasing enforcement, building more detention facilities, and adding 1,000 new border patrol guards.

The President also urged lawmakers to approve a temporary guest worker program.

"We're going to strengthen our immigration laws in the country and together with Congress we are going to create a temporary worker program that will take pressure off the borders, bring workers from out of the shadows and reject amnesty."

Eleven million foreigners are currently working illegally in the United States. Congressional leaders agree change is needed but many are divided on the president's temporary worker program, which would allow undocumented workers to stay in the country, penalty free, for up to six years. Critics say the proposal is too soft on illegal immigrants while others say the reforms do not go far enough.

Immigration lawyer Laura Reiff believes the guest worker program, as it stands, is impractical.

"We don't think people will come out of the shadows and sign up, which defeats the national security purpose. We want to know who's here so we can use our limited enforcement mechanisms to go after the bad guys."

Some Americans believe the government is not doing enough. Nearly one million illegal aliens tried to cross the U.S. border from Mexico last year, prompting hundreds of volunteers to join the "Minutemen", a team of citizen border patrol guards who notify authorities of suspicious crossings and take pictures of illegal workers and employers.

Maryland volunteer Chuck Floyd denies allegations that members are vigilantes, but says something needs to be done.

"First off, we have to secure our borders, that's a must. Then we have to work with Congress, Department of State, Department of Justice and Homeland Security to bring the chaos under control."

President Bush will push the same message when he travels to Texas on Tuesday.

But whether the president's plan moves forward will depend on U.S. lawmakers who have postponed discussion on immigration reform until early next year.

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