

ECON WOES HIT IMMIGRATION

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Body

THESE ARE, to say the least, uncertain times, and the mood of the country is not one of celebration. Yet there is a group of people that is having a great time.

We are talking about the anti-immigration crowd, for whom one of their fondest dreams is finally becoming a reality: After years of continued growth, immigration to the U.S. is slowing down dramatically.

Last year, about 500,000 immigrants entered the country - less than half the 1.8 million the year before, according to the Census Bureau. That, along with the fact that thousands of immigrants are returning to their countries on their own, is shrinking the foreign-born population in the U.S.

Before the partying gets out of hand, those who have made a career out of dehumanizing immigrants and criminalizing their hard work should pause and think about why this is happening.

"There are no jobs, no chance to become legal; they treat us worse than criminals," said Efrén Ramos, a 22-year-old construction worker who lives in Jackson Heights. "What am I doing here?"

In other words, the nation's sharp economic downturn and lack of available jobs, coupled with the human rights crisis provoked by the administration's enforcement-only immigration policy (for lack of a better word), have made migrating to the U.S. a less plausible road. The beacon of a generous America where success can be achieved by working hard and believing in the future has dimmed considerably.

But the very same factors that are discouraging immigration also are threatening like never before the livelihood and future of every American. Obviously there is not much to celebrate, even for the rabid anti-immigration crowd.

Ramos and thousands of other immigrants who made their living in the construction industry during the housing boom of the early 2000s were victimized along with the rest of the American workers and middle class by the housing market crash that threatens to bring the nation's economy down with it.

Now President Bush is pushing Congress to hurry up and give Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson unfettered control over \$700 billion to bail out Wall Street for its out-of-control speculation and greed. No one should forget that this \$700 billion comes on top of the \$900 million that paid for the bailouts of, among others, A.I.G., Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac and Bear Stearns.

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Life, though, is full of surprises. It is ironic to see the right-wing Bush administration taking socialist measures like the nationalization of Wall Street, in a mad rush to try to resolve a crisis created under their watch by deregulation, rampant corruption, and limitless greed.

"When a government in Latin America nationalizes a corporation because it's not serving the poor, we are told it is 'banana-republic socialism,' " said Rep. José Serrano (D-Bronx). "Why is it that when we nationalize a whole sector of our economy because the rich are affected, it is a must-do action to save Wall Street, our national economy and capitalism itself?"

One of the differences, of course, is that Washington wants to nationalize the losers - and make taxpayers foot the bill - but will not touch the winners. As someone pointed out, how come no one talks about nationalizing Exxon?

Yes, **immigration** is slowing down. But not even those who have traded anti-immigrant demagoguery into profitable media and political careers should be celebrating. We are all in the same boat.

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