

Focus on Immigration;

The Statue of Liberty is a symbol for a land of immigrants. But immigration still sparks debate. The House approved a major immigration bill this week only after provisions aimed at legal immigrants were stripped, and Senate action looms. Here are the thoughts of some newcomers.;

JOSE ANGEL MEDELLIN

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Body

Mexican thinks like American

In his heart, he'll tell you, he's **still** a Mexican. But in his everyday life, **Jose Angel Medellin** acts every bit the American.

"I've grown up here," he said. "I think like an American. I **still** believe in the American Dream. I wish someone would tell me who is an American, anyway. Being **legal** in this country, I feel as American as the most American."

Medellin, now 33, came to the United States as a teenager in 1975 **after** his sister, who was here legally, became his **legal** guardian. His parents, at the time illegal **immigrants**, worked in canneries in Milwaukee and later became **legal** residents.

Medellin studied political science at Indiana University in Bloomington, but he became more interested in radio. He was employed at radio stations in Dallas and San Antonio before coming to Atlanta 1 1/2 years ago to work as program director for Spanish-language station WAXZ (AM 1550 and FM 101.9) in Smyrna. He appears on-air daily (3-5 p.m.) on a program called "The Hot Potato."

He and his Mexican-American wife of 15 years and their three children live in Marietta. The children - a boy and two girls - are bilingual.

"I don't forbid them talking English," **Medellin** said. "But I insist they talk Spanish. They'll have an advantage given to them at birth that they shouldn't lose."

Those American-born children help keep **Medellin** and others like him here. "I believe most Mexicans used to have one foot here and one foot in Mexico," he said. "But through the years, they've sunk roots. I have children here. You have to stay with your blood."

Steady employment, of course, is also an attraction.

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"There's a tremendous potential here for anyone who likes to work," Medellin said. "It's been proven that Mexicans come to work."

And that's not about to change, he said, despite efforts to curtail immigration. "If you put up 1,000 walls, they'll still find a way to enter this country," he declared.

Medellin said the United States "should have controls" on its borders but that "visas should be well distributed."

"This country should keep in mind that it was formed by people who were legal and illegal," he said.

The rising tide of anti-immigrant feeling, led in part by Republican presidential candidate Pat Buchanan, could backfire. It may lead Medellin and others to become more involved.

"With Buchanans growing like tomatoes everywhere, there's an advantage to becoming an American citizen," Medellin said. "After living here so many years, I realize that if I want to count, I have to vote."

Graphic

Photo: Jose Angel Medellin, who works at WAXZ radio, came to the United

States from Mexico to be a student after his sister, who was here

legally, became his legal guardian. / JOE McTYRE / Staff

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