

Mr. Bush's Immigration Realism

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Body

Every now and then the public gets a glimpse of the George W. **Bush** who is a calm realist on **immigration**, a former governor of a border state who knows, likes and understands Latino immigrants. It's an identity sharply at odds with that of many other members of his Republican Party, especially the snarlers clustered on its right wing.

At his news conference yesterday, **Mr. Bush** commented on the raids at Swift & Company, the meatpacking giant that, to nobody's surprise, seems to have had hundreds of illegal immigrants with forged papers on its low-skill work force. **Mr. Bush** did not condemn the detainees as border-crossing evildoers. He spoke with startling tolerance.

"The system we have in place has caused people to rely upon smugglers and forgers in order to do work Americans aren't doing," **Mr. Bush** said. "It is a system that, frankly, leads to inhumane treatment of people."

He continued: "The best way to deal with an issue that Americans agree on -- that we ought to enforce our borders in a humane way -- is we've got to have a comprehensive bill."

Mr. Bush understands that many illegal immigrants are doing what they have to do to support families within a system that offers few routes to lawful entry. He understands that giving immigrants the opportunity to earn an honest foothold in this country -- the path to citizenship despised by restrictionists as "amnesty" -- is not giving a reward to criminals. It is not something for nothing. It is an attempt to fix a system that draws in millions of illegal immigrants each year, efficiently taking their labor but withholding hope.

Mr. Bush has shown a way to move the debate away from the "amnesty" trap by casting reform as a means to end an abusive system and remove the perverse incentives that allow illegality to flourish. It may sound shocking to say that illegal immigrants deserve better. But as long as this country keeps swallowing them up into a broken, unjust system, they do.

Mr. Bush showed yesterday that he gets it. He should do that more often.

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