

HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE GIVES BUSH IMMIGRATION PLAN COLD SHOULDER

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Body

House Republicans and Democrats gave a generally chilly reception Wednesday to President **Bush**'s proposal to grant temporary visas to an unlimited number of **foreign workers**.

Chairman John N. Hostettler of the House Judiciary's immigration subcommittee told the panel that nearly 12 million American workers in construction, service, and other low-wage fields stand to "lose their jobs to recruits from abroad" under such a **plan**.

Rep. Floyd Flake, R-Ariz., one of the few members who defended the temporary worker **plan**, said that stopping the illegal flow of immigrants was impossible and that building contractors and restaurant owners and other industries need the labor they provide.

Most Republicans at the hearing took the opposing side, however. The **Bush plan** "opens up every job in America" to competition from low-wage foreigners, said Rep. Lamar Smith of Texas, who added that the result would be to depress wages and displace American workers.

Democratic lawmakers also criticized the **Bush** proposal, largely for its failure to include a pathway to permanent residency and citizenship for millions of illegal residents now here. Undocumented immigrants who have been living and working here for years "should have a chance to earn legal status," said Rep. Linda Sanchez of California.

Experts at the House subcommittee hearing predicted dire results for American workers, especially those without high school diplomas, if the doors were opened to a massive influx of legal **foreign workers**.

Especially hurt would be African-Americans, said Frank L. Morris, the former dean of graduate studies at Morgan State University in Baltimore. Morris. Speaking for a private group that seeks to reduce immigration, he said evidence already shows that "employers prefer immigrants to African-American workers."

Mark Krikorian, executive director of the Center for Immigration Studies, another group that seeks lower rates of immigration, said that the U.S. economy suffers when there is an over supply of low-wage, low-skilled labor. The apparel industry and agriculture are falling behind in developing advanced mechanization, he said.

One witness defended the concept of legalizing millions of residents already here and opening the door for more newcomers.

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"Our present immigration system is broken," said Muzaffar Chishti, director of the Migration Policy Institute at the New York University law school. He said that it would be inhumane and impractical to think of expelling the 8-to-14 million people now living here illegally, many with deep roots in America.

Even so, Chishti said that, unlike the president's plan, any temporary worker program should have a numerical limit, strict sanctions for employers who abuse it and "vastly more" resources for enforcement.

The president's plan has stalled on Capitol Hill after a single hearing on the Senate side. A Senate Republican leadership aide said Wednesday that no major immigration bill is likely to pass this year.

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