

## **Witnesses: *quest worker program* needs strict labor enforcement**

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### **Body**

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Labor laws must be enforced for any **quest worker program** to work, but the nation lacks enough labor inspectors to adequately do so, witnesses testified in a House hearing Tuesday.

Several witnesses agreed in the hearing before the House Judiciary immigration and claims subcommittee that abuses are likely in any **quest worker program** based on experiences of current U.S. **quest worker programs**.

"Any good **quest worker program** must have protections in place and extremely good enforcement regime," said Susan Martin, director of the Institute for the Study of International Migration.

But Martin said the Department of Labor is understaffed and even now work sites are not routinely visited to enforce immigration and labor laws.

Two meetings have been held between high level officials from the United States and Mexico to come up with a proposal that would allow Mexican **workers** to legally enter the United States as temporary or **quest workers**.

The hope is the **workers** would get training, skills and earnings that would improve their country's economy, while the United States gets badly **needed** labor and control of illegal immigration.

No **quest worker** bill has been introduced in the House, but legislation could be introduced in the Senate as soon as this week.

Cecilia Munoz, vice president of the National Council of La Raza, said her group would vigorously oppose a **quest worker** proposal that did not include enforcement of labor rights. The council is the nation's largest Hispanic organization.

The hearing was the first to be held on **quest worker** discussions ongoing between the administrations of President Bush and Mexican President Vicente Fox.

Rep. Jeff Flake, R-Ariz., suggested any **quest worker program** might be humanitarian because it would allow **workers** to return to Mexico to visit families and legally return to work without making treacherous trips across the border.

Fourteen people died last month trying to cross the Arizona desert. Many others also have died in border crossings.

But Munoz said a **quest worker program** would be humane only if it provides **workers** full labor rights, access to legal assistance and a potential for **workers** to become legal residents.

Witnesses: guest worker program needs strict labor enforcement

"The current (guest worker programs, I wouldn't describe as humanitarian," Munoz said. "They may be a few notches better than dying in the desert absolutely. But that is not justification for the existing structure. We need to be treating workers more humanely."

But employers need guest workers to make up for a shrinking American work force, said Randel Johnson, U.S. Chamber of Commerce vice president for labor policy. He said current guest worker programs are unworkable.

"Immigration law is not right now responding to the needs of the employer community trying to bring in workers," Johnson said.

Mark Krikorian, executive director of the Center for Immigration Studies, opposed any guest worker program, saying they encourage illegal immigration and affect the wages of lower skilled workers. He also said the Immigration and Naturalization Service, already dealing with backlogs in processing immigration applications and other management problems, would be ill-equipped to handle a new guest worker program.

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