

## **Food stamp plan would skip Latinos;**

### **Advocate cites 'legal' barrier**

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

January 19, 2002 Saturday,, Home Edition

Copyright 2002 The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution  
ajc.com

**Section:** Gwinnett;

**Length:** 586 words

**Byline:** RICK BADIE

## **Body**

---

Some observers call President George W. Bush's **plan** to restore **food stamp** benefits to **legal** immigrants a safety net for tough times.

Others consider the idea --- expected to have little impact on Gwinnett's or the rest of Georgia's welfare rolls --- an election ploy to lure Latino votes.

On Jan. 10, the Bush administration proposed to restore **food stamps** to **legal** immigrants whose benefits eligibility was restricted by the 1996 welfare reform law. That law made low-income noncitizens ineligible for **food stamps** and other federally funded assistance, though some exemptions for immigrants remained in existence.

AJC

About 363,000 people --- **legal** immigrants but noncitizens --- would qualify under the **plan**. Most would be Hispanics, but they would have to have lived here legally for five years.

The proposal will be part of Bush's 2003 budget to Congress next month. It will cost the federal government \$2.1 billion over 10 years, and at least some version of it is expected to become law.

What effect would the Bush **plan** have on the 435,000 Hispanics who live in Gwinnett and across the state?

"Very minimal," predicted Teodoro Maus, former Mexican consul. "There are very, very few people here that would really qualify for being a **legal** resident."

Maritza Soto Keen, executive director of the Latin American Association, said the number of Georgia recipients would be "nominal. This Latino community comes here looking for jobs," she said. "Not hand-outs."

Statewide, 263,361 people received **food stamps** in December, according to recent figures from the Division of Family and Children Services. Gwinnett had 3,973 recipients for that same period, records show.

Georgia and some other states continued welfare benefits to **legal** immigrants after federal money dried up. Figures were not available on the number of **legal** immigrants who pocketed **food stamps** before and after the 1996 welfare law. They typically are ineligible now, but there are exceptions based on a person's age, work history and date of entry into the country.

## Food stamp plan would skip Latinos; Advocate cites 'legal' barrier

Bush, who enjoys a good rapport with Hispanic Americans, has been criticized for his proposal by advocates for stricter immigration standards. They consider it another political party overture for the Latino vote. Both parties are courting the ethnic group.

"Allowing immigrants to tap into our welfare system simply encourages more foreigners to come here and become public charges," said Donna Locke, coordinator for the Georgia Coalition for Immigration Reform, which supports stricter laws.

The proposal, Locke said, sends a message: "Break into the candy store, get all the candy as a reward."

Meanwhile, the Federation for American Immigration Reform called the plan "an election-year ploy" to win Hispanic votes. The White House, suggested FAIR executive director Dan Stein should work to "cut immigration levels and change policies" that draw unskilled people here.

But Raul Yzaguirre, president of the National Council of La Raza, a civil rights organization that plans to open an Atlanta office this year, praised Bush because, "We know that immigrant communities are among those hardest hit by the current recession."

And though the proposal won't make much of a difference in Georgia, Maus and Keen support its principle.

It's a "safety net" for those suffering through the recession, Keen said.

She, like Maus, said legal residents pay into the system, "so there should be no reason they shouldn't be eligible for benefits."

## Classification

---

**Language:** ENGLISH

**Subject:** CITIZENSHIP (90%); US FEDERAL GOVERNMENT (90%); WELFARE BENEFITS (90%); IMMIGRATION LAW (90%); **FOOD STAMPS** (90%); IMMIGRATION (89%); INCOME ASSISTANCE (89%); PUBLIC HEALTH & WELFARE LAW (89%); HISPANIC AMERICANS (89%); US POLITICAL PARTIES (89%); EXECUTIVES (78%); ETHNIC GROUPS (78%); POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS (76%); LEGISLATION (76%); CAMPAIGNS & ELECTIONS (76%); DEMOGRAPHIC GROUPS (71%); FAMILY SERVICES (70%); LOW INCOME PERSONS (70%); ASSOCIATIONS & ORGANIZATIONS (70%)

**Industry:** BUDGETS (77%)

**Person:** GEORGE W BUSH (69%)

**Geographic:** GEORGIA, USA (94%); UNITED STATES (94%); MEXICO (79%); LATIN AMERICA (69%)

**Load-Date:** January 19, 2002