

Bush to propose easing rules for foreign workers in U.S.;
The plan would make it easier for immigrants to cross the border for low-
wage, low-skill jobs.

The Philadelphia Inquirer

JANUARY 7, 2004 Wednesday CITY-D EDITION

Copyright 2004 Philadelphia Newspapers, LLC All Rights Reserved

The Philadelphia Inquirer

Found on Philly.com

Section: NATIONAL; Pg. A03

Length: 930 words

Byline: Ron Hutcheson INQUIRER WASHINGTON BUREAU

Dateline: WASHINGTON

Body

President **Bush** will outline **plans** today for an overhaul of the nation's immigration laws to **make** it **easier** for **foreign workers** to get **jobs** in the **United States**.

In a bid to end decades of restrictive immigration policies, **Bush** will call for the creation of a guest-**worker** program that would open the **borders** to **immigrants** seeking **low**-skilled, **low-wage jobs**. It would also let the estimated eight million **workers** who are here illegally get legal status by joining the guest-**worker** program.

Foreign workers could stay for three years, with the possibility of extensions if they want to stay longer. Administration officials said **Bush** would not call for a specific limit on the number of extensions.

Under **Bush's plan**, the guest **workers** would have the same rights on **job** sites as **U.S. workers**. They could travel freely to and from their home countries and bring dependents to the **United States**, as long as they could show an ability to support them. They could also apply to become permanent residents, a key first step toward citizenship.

Administration officials pledged to work with Congress to come up with ways to **make** sure that guest **workers** get **jobs** that Americans do not want.

"Immigration laws should meet our economic needs," White House spokesman Scott McClellan said. "If employers are offering **jobs** to Americans that Americans are not willing to fill, then we ought to welcome to our country those who will fill that **job**."

The **proposal** has widespread support in the business community, especially among industries that depend on **foreign workers**, such as restaurants, agriculture, and landscape services. **Immigrant**-advocacy groups also welcomed the scheduled announcement, though some questioned **Bush's** commitment to the issue.

Skeptics said the long-delayed White House **plan** seemed timed to help **Bush** with Hispanic voters in the Nov. 2 presidential election. It is also likely to improve **Bush's** relationship with Mexican President Vicente Fox, who will be host to **Bush's** two-day visit to Monterrey, Mexico, next week.

Bush to propose easing rules for foreign workers in U.S.; The plan would make it easier for immigrants to cross the border for low-wage, low-skill jobs.

Advocates on both sides of the issue agreed that the outlook for congressional action would depend on how hard **Bush** pushed for the legislation.

"If it comes to Congress without any influence from the White House, I firmly believe that it won't go anywhere," said Carlos Espinosa, a spokesman for Rep. Tom Tancredo (R., Colo.), a leading opponent of **Bush's** approach. "If he's sincere about it, there's probably little anybody can do to fight it."

Administration officials were less confident on pushing the **plan** through Congress.

"These are very tough issues," one senior administration official said. "We intend to move apace and aggressively on this, but I certainly wouldn't handicap congressional action. Who knows?"

The White House **plan**, drafted with help from Karl Rove, **Bush's** chief political adviser, would be the most far-reaching rewrite of immigration laws since 1986.

The 1986 law gave amnesty to millions of illegal **immigrants** but imposed tough new sanctions on employers who continued to hire undocumented **workers**. Those changes failed to dent the demand for illegal **workers**.

Bush's proposal acknowledges the failure of earlier efforts to curb illegal immigration and gives illegal **workers** a chance to come into the open. The **workers** would have to agree to go home when their work was finished.

"There are a lot of moving parts with respect to the details," the administration official said, insisting on anonymity to avoid any repercussions from getting ahead of **Bush's** announcement.

The **plan** would also establish reciprocal agreements with other countries so that **foreign workers** who pay into the Social Security system in this country would get credit for those payments in the native country's retirement system.

In another change, **Bush** will urge Congress to increase the annual limit on green cards, which are given to **immigrants** who become permanent residents on the track to citizenship. Administration officials said **Bush** would not offer a specific target beyond the current limit of 140,000 a year - far short of the demand.

Bush first broached the idea of **easing** immigration laws shortly after taking office in 2001, but he put the project on hold when the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks heightened concerns about **border** security. The delay angered Fox, who had staked his political prestige on his ability to win concessions from **Bush**.

Although the White House **proposal** will fall far short of Fox's goal of a completely open **border**, it will give the Mexican leader a diplomatic victory.

Advocates of a less restrictive immigration policy contend that the changes would enhance security by ending the underground commerce in **foreign workers**.

"Certainly from a security standpoint, it **makes** sense to allow people to come out of the shadows," said Cecilia Munoz, vice president for policy at the National Council of La Raza, an **immigrant**-rights group.

Advocates of tough immigration policies say any effort to **ease** restrictions would create a security nightmare.

"The vast majority of these people are paid under the table. There are no records," said Espinosa, the congressional aide. "We have no way of verifying who these people are."

Administration officials insisted that enhanced **border** security and other changes since the 2001 terror attacks had resolved any security concerns about the **proposed** immigration changes.

Contact reporter Ron Hutcheson

at 202-383-6101 or rhutcheson@krwashington.com.

Bush to propose easing rules for foreign workers in U.S.;The plan would make it easier for immigrants to cross the border for low-wage, low-skill jobs.

Knight Ridder correspondent Susana Hayward contributed to this article.

Graphic

PHOTO;

DAVID MAUNG, Associated Press

In Tijuana, Mexico, (from left) Juan Carlos Hernandez, Dario Reyes and Juan Bejerano show the city-issued cards that identify them as migrants at Casa del Migrante, a shelter for immigrants.

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Subject: IMMIGRATION (94%); FOREIGN LABOR (93%); ELECTIONS (79%); HEADS OF GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS (79%); US PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES 2008 (79%); CITIZENSHIP (78%); LEGISLATION (78%); PUBLIC POLICY (78%); VOTERS & VOTING (74%); WAGES & SALARIES (73%); HISPANIC AMERICANS (73%); TERRITORIAL & NATIONAL BORDERS (73%); CAMPAIGNS & ELECTIONS (71%); US PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS (70%)

Organization: CASA (59%)

Industry: LANDSCAPING SERVICES (72%)

Person: GEORGE W BUSH (79%); VICENTE FOX QUESADA (59%); THOMAS G TANCREDO (59%); KARL ROVE (59%)

Geographic: COLORADO, USA (79%); UNITED STATES (94%); MEXICO (92%)

Load-Date: August 21, 2005