

## **AHEAD OF FOX VISIT, BUSH WARNS: AMNESTY PUSH APPEARS STALLED**

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### **Body**

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President **Bush** acknowledged Friday that his effort to liberalize immigration policy is bogged down in political quicksand and said he does not expect any breakthroughs during next week's state **visit** by Mexican President Vicente **Fox**.

Officials from both countries had hoped to cap **Fox**'s three-day **visit** with a far-reaching proposal designed to make it easier for Mexican workers to enter the United States legally. Instead, **Bush** and **Fox** will settle for a broad "statement of principles" that dodges the issue of what to do about illegal workers who are already here.

**Fox**, the first foreign leader **Bush** has honored with an official state **visit**, will **visit** the White House on Wednesday to open a whirlwind tour that includes a formal state dinner, a speech to a joint session of Congress and an excursion to the U.S. heartland on Air Force One. The two presidents will travel to Toledo, Ohio, on Thursday to **visit** a family-resource center that serves Mexican-Americans.

In an Oval Office interview with Texas reporters Friday, **Bush** sought to dampen expectations of a major shift in immigration policy. Acknowledging criticism from anti-immigrant groups and some of his fellow Republicans in Congress, **Bush** said he was in no rush to alter the law.

The effort to liberalize immigration policy toward Mexico began with great fanfare in February, when **Fox** hosted the new U.S. president at his ranch in San Cristobal. In a sign of his commitment, **Bush** assigned Secretary of State Colin Powell and Attorney General John Ashcroft to work with their Mexican counterparts on a range of options that included a new guest-worker program for Mexicans and **amnesty** for illegal workers.

Six months later, the effort **appears** to be **stalled**.

"It's going to take awhile to develop a specific set of recommendations for Congress to mull over," **Bush** said. "The complexity of the issue is such that we've got to spend time on it."

He declined to offer a timetable for action, saying only, "as soon as is realistic."

The president also expressed concerns that the stagnant U.S. economy might make Americans less willing to accept foreign workers.

"The slowing down of our economy is going to affect job creation," he said. "This is a slow economy, particularly in the manufacturing sector, and it's going to affect all jobs -- the jobs of people who live in America today and the jobs of people who might be seeking work in America tomorrow."

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Although **Bush** said he supports the concept of a guest-worker program, he said he is undecided on whether workers should be allowed to seek permanent resident status or citizenship.

"That's part of the issue that we're working out," he said. "One of the issues we've got to deal with is the fairness issue. The issue is: Should someone who has been waiting in line be supplanted by someone who didn't go through the legal process?"

Some Republicans worry that legalizing Mexican workers will help Democrats, because Mexican-Americans traditionally vote Democratic.

"Immigration is basically the Kevorkian cocktail for the Republicans --it's suicidal," said Dan Stein of the Federation for American Immigration Reform, an organization that favors more restrictions on immigration. "**Bush** is leading Republicans down a road that they're not going to be willing to go down."

**Fox** has repeatedly urged the United States to loosen its immigration policies. More than 3 million Mexicans are thought to be in the United States illegally, and the money they send home has become a vital part of Mexico's sputtering economy.

The issue has become a test of clout for the new Mexican president, who is determined to elevate his country's status on the world stage. Although **Fox** has made fast friends with **Bush** and other foreign leaders, his popularity in Mexico has declined along with that nation's economy.

"He knows that his trip won't solve the migration problem," said Luis Pazos, a prominent Mexican legislator and a member of **Fox's** National Action Party. "But he can show Congress and the public that Mexico is now an open country, with which all kinds of new arrangements are possible."

At the same time, **Fox** is under pressure to produce results to help counter his domestic critics.

Sen. Humberto Roque Villanueva of the Institutional Revolutionary Party said **Fox** is living "the syndrome of Gorbachev, who was wildly popular abroad, while people in the Soviet Union wouldn't give a centavo for him."

**Fox's visit** to the United States is his sixth trip north of the border since he took office Dec. 1 and his fifth **visit** with **Bush**. He again will be vigorous in his efforts to sell a different vision of Mexico.

After a formal arrival ceremony Wednesday on the White House South Lawn, **Fox** and **Bush** will preside over a joint U.S.-Mexican Cabinet meeting.

Wednesday night, **Bush** will host his first state dinner. In contrast with former President Clinton, who favored larger gatherings in the East Room of the White House, **Bush** and his wife, Laura, plan to use the more intimate setting of the mansion's State Dining Room.

"It's going to be a formal, elegant affair," **Bush** said. **Fox** will be accompanied by his new wife, Marta, his former aide, whom he married in July.

Thursday, **Fox** will address a joint session of Congress before heading off to Toledo with **Bush**. They will return to Washington that night for a dinner hosted by **Fox** at Blair House, across the street from the White House.

Friday, **Fox** will meet with congressional leaders and AFL-CIO chief John Sweeney, who wants undocumented workers legalized -- and unionized. He also will speak to the Organization of American States before traveling to Miami for a speech at a Miami Herald conference on the Americas, followed by dinner with Florida Gov. Jeb **Bush**, the president's brother, who is married to a native Mexican.

## Notes

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Ron Hutcheson reported from Washington, Morris Thompson from Mexico City.

## Graphic

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Photo;

PHOTO: JOHN MOORE -- ASSOCIATED PRESS ARCHIVES

Mexican President Vicente **Fox**, shown here with President **Bush** in February, will make a three-day U.S. **visit** next week.

## Classification

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