

TASK FORCE CONSIDERS PLAN TO OFFER PERMANENT RESIDENCY TO ILLEGAL MEXICAN IMMIGRANTS;

OPTIONS FOR DEALING WITH BORDER ISSUES MAY BE READY FOR BUSH IN SEPTEMBER

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Body

The administration of President George W. **Bush** is **considering** granting legal **residency** to millions of undocumented **Mexican immigrants** living in the United States.

Such amnesty, requiring the approval of Congress, would give a **permanent** reprieve to certain Mexicans living undercover in this country, largely in the **border** states. It also could be a political boon to the Republican president as he seeks Hispanic support.

There are 3 million **Mexican**-born people living illegally in the United States, according to a report last week by Mexico's National Population Council.

An immigration **task force** of top Justice and State Department officials **planned** to send **Bush** a report today on the broad outlines of U.S.-Mexico **border issues**. It will recommend that the United States take action to address **illegal** immigration, but will stop short of **offering** concrete proposals, a Justice Department official said Sunday.

The **task force** is **considering** several **options**, including a proposal to give the **illegal Mexican immigrants permanent residency**, said the official, speaking on the condition of anonymity. That is what **Mexican** President Vicente Fox has been pressing **Bush** for.

The official said major unanswered questions include how quickly the **immigrants** could earn legal status, and whether they would gain such status based on date of entry into the United States, or by occupation, such as farm worker.

The working group was formed after **Bush** and Fox met in February. Attorney General John Ashcroft and Secretary of State Colin Powell lead the **task force**, which hopes to have recommendations on such questions by **September**, when **Bush** and Fox meet in Washington.

Ashcroft will meet with **Mexican** officials in California and Arizona this month to discuss **border issues**. He and Powell also will meet with their **Mexican** counterparts early next month.

The preliminary report will be presented to **Bush** as Fox completes a five-day visit to the United States this week. Fox was to meet with U.S. auto executives and union officials today in Detroit.

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Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., said he would back the kind of amnesty move now under consideration.

"I believe that these people are living here, and it's a recognition of reality. They are working here," he said on NBC's "Meet the Press."

But Sen. Trent Lott, R-Miss., sounded a more cautious note.

"Just to summarily grant legal status to 3 million people, many of them that got here illegally and have violated the law while they're here - I'd want to make sure we do this carefully," he said on "Fox News Sunday."

Some Democrats also object, mindful of union fears that guest-worker and amnesty programs could drive down wages and decrease job opportunities for Americans.

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