

## Fall 2006 Immigration Update 5

December 30, 2006

### Immigration Raids Hit Colorado, Five Other States

The December 12 U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids on Swift & Co. meat-packing plants in six states, including Colorado, have been widely covered in the Colorado media. To summarize, nearly 1,300 workers at Swift facilities in Colorado, Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, Utah, and Texas were taken into custody. A number have been charged with violating immigration laws while a smaller number also face charges related to identity-theft. Many face administrative proceedings that could lead to deportation. In Colorado, 261 people were arrested.

The ICE news release on the raids, as well as information on services provided by ICE to detainees and their families and a list of best hiring practices, is available from the ICE home page: <http://www.ice.gov/>. Quoted in the press release was Assistant Secretary of Homeland Security Julie Myers, "This investigation has uncovered a disturbing front in the war against illegal immigration. We believe that the genuine identities of possibly hundreds of U.S. citizens are being stolen or hijacked by criminal organizations and sold to illegal aliens in order to gain unlawful employment in this country. Combating this burgeoning problem is one of ICE's highest priorities."

The *NewsHour* featured a "debate" between Secretary Meyers and a representative of the union, the United Food and Commercial Workers Union, that represents the Swift workers on *The NewsHour*; a transcript of the program is available at [http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/social\\_issues/july-dec06/immigration\\_12-13.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/social_issues/july-dec06/immigration_12-13.html). In Colorado, the local affiliate of the union has filed a lawsuit, asking that those still being detained be released and claiming that workers were mistreated and denied access to lawyers. Meanwhile, 18 former Swift employees in Texas have filed suit against the company, saying that Swift depressed wages by intentionally hiring unauthorized immigrants.

Government officials have not yet revealed whether Swift will face any charges. Fines against employers have declined precipitously in recent years—from 1,023 in 1998 to three in 2004 (the most recent year for which information is available). ICE representative Marc Raimondi has said, "We're not really doing fines anymore" because they "were almost seen as a cost of doing business and were not seen as effective. We prefer to conduct criminal investigations." Some observers criticize this approach. For example, Steve Camarota of the Center for Immigration Studies says that federal agents "aren't doing the regular work of going after the employers who hire illegal (workers). They're trying for only very spectacular things." Doris Meissner, former head of the INS, agrees that employers should be punished but argues that, if they are to be held accountable, they should have access to a better status verification system. For more information on the federal approach to businesses who hire unauthorized migrants, see [http://www.denverpost.com/ci\\_4850850](http://www.denverpost.com/ci_4850850).

## **Piton Foundation Newsletter Focuses on Immigration and the Schools**

The Piton Foundation, which funded CELD's New Coloradans project, recently devoted an issue of its education magazine, *HeadFirst*, to how schools have responded to the influx of immigrants in the past ten years. Piton sent writers to four school districts to gather diverse perspectives on the topic—the Roaring Fork Valley, Aurora, Denver (specifically Harrington Elementary), and Yuma. The articles on these four districts' response to the rising number of immigrant students can be found at <http://www.headfirstcolorado.org/articles.php>.

The writers highlight demographic changes that would have a huge impact on any district. For example, in Aurora, the number of English language learners has ballooned from 2,350 in 1995 to 10,700 today; for 88 percent of those students, Spanish is their native language. At Yuma High School, 10 percent of students were Latino in 1999; now, 34 percent are Latino. In Roaring Fork Valley, the percentage of Latino students soared from 17 percent in 1997 to 40 percent today. A shortage of teachers with strong training in how to teach second-language learners is felt in both the Metro area and more rural parts of the state. But the articles also point to some promising practices—dual immersion programs in Denver, emphasis on strong academics, outreach to parents, and emphasis on parental involvement.

Piton's education officer, Alan Gottlieb, author of the article on Yuma, was interviewed December 28 on Colorado Public Radio's *Colorado Matters*; access that article from [http://www.kcfr.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=94&Itemid=234&target\\_pg=com\\_day&date=12/25/2006](http://www.kcfr.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=94&Itemid=234&target_pg=com_day&date=12/25/2006).

## **Brokaw Report Focuses on Immigration in the Roaring Fork Valley**

Former NBC news anchor Tom Brokaw's recently completed a report focused on unauthorized immigration in Colorado's Roaring Fork Valley. You (like us) may have missed the program because it aired on the day after Christmas. However, a transcript and other information are available at <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/16286635/>. The transcript provides some interesting Colorado "case studies" of the impact and import of illegal immigration—particularly in schools and the construction industry.

In a blog entry (<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/16318369/>), Brokaw identifies seven points that he deems "indisputable":

1. In many parts of the country immigrants are doing the work Americans no longer want to do, especially the hard work of manual labor at construction sites.
2. In our reporting we discovered that most of them are paid a fair wage — \$14.00 an hour for an entry level construction job, and that they are paying state and federal taxes through withholding. (Sure, some employers pay cash off the books but most we encountered are trying to play by the rules).

3. While local residents are conflicted about the spreading Hispanic culture - language and music - they agree the immigrants are very hard workers and in general have good family values.
4. But it is also clear the immigrants are straining the public and health systems without paying their fair share.
5. They live in overcrowded, often sub-standard housing in clear violation of local laws.
6. They're brazen about acquiring forged documents — from Social Security cards to driver's licenses — to get work.
7. And, most important, this complicated problem won't be solved until Mexico becomes a reliable partner in improving its own economy and enforcing the rules at its border.

(Quoted from "Indisputable points in the immigration debate," by Tom Brokaw, December 22, 2006, MSNBC.com)

Ryan Warner of *Colorado Matters* interviewed Brokaw for a program that aired on December 22. That program can be heard on the Colorado Public Radio website at [http://www.kcfr.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=94&Itemid=234&target\\_pg=com\\_day&date=12/22/2006](http://www.kcfr.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=94&Itemid=234&target_pg=com_day&date=12/22/2006).

## **The Immigration Issue in Photos**

Photographs can be useful tools in teaching about immigration, whether used as prompts for civil conversations, the raw material for photo essays constructed by students, or primary sources for examining topics from media bias to the impact of immigration on communities and individuals. Many excellent photographs on immigration are available online. For example, *Time* magazine selected three Anthony Suau photos (see photos 5-7 at <http://www.time.com/time/yip/2006/>) taken along the U.S.-Mexico border among its photos of the year. *Time.com* also features several 2006 photo essays on the topic, including one on the Border Patrol entitled "Securing the Perimeter" ([http://www.time.com/time/photoessays/2006/border\\_patrol/](http://www.time.com/time/photoessays/2006/border_patrol/)), "Immigration Hits the Streets," about the immigration demonstrations last spring ([http://www.time.com/time/photoessays/2006/immigration\\_rallies/](http://www.time.com/time/photoessays/2006/immigration_rallies/)), "The Immigrant Plight," on immigration patterns of single community in Mexico ([http://www.time.com/time/photoessays/2006/mexican\\_dream/](http://www.time.com/time/photoessays/2006/mexican_dream/)), and "Immigration Dagnet," on Border Patrol agents seeking undocumented migrants ([http://www.time.com/time/photoessays/2006/mexican\\_immigration/](http://www.time.com/time/photoessays/2006/mexican_immigration/)).

A fascinating set of photographs can be found at <http://www.borderfilmproject.com/>. The three founders of this project, self-described as "a Rhodes scholar, a filmmaker, and a Wall Street analyst," distributed disposable cameras to members of the Minutemen and to unauthorized migrants. They have posted 95 of the resulting photographs on this website and have mounted exhibitions in several cities, including Phoenix, Houston, and New York.

## **Process of Becoming a Citizen Slows**

According to a December 10 article in the *Denver Post*, a backlog in FBI investigations of prospective citizens who have applied for citizenship and passed the citizenship test has resulted in longer waits for applicants. Some immigrants seeking citizenship have waited more than two years to be cleared by the FBI. And many, particularly Muslim applicants, are now suing because such long waits violate federal law, which requires that citizenship be granted or denied within 120 days of passage of the citizenship test. The FBI asserts that it is not discriminating against Muslim applicants, although some applicants and immigration attorneys question that assertion.

The requirement for an FBI background check for those applying for citizenship was enacted following the September 11, 2001, attacks as a safeguard against terrorists entering the country. However, there is now a backlog of more than 400,000 applicants who need background checks, and hundreds of lawsuits have been filed against the FBI and Department of Homeland Security. More than 30 have been filed in Colorado alone this year.

Meanwhile, people on both sides of the issue acknowledge that the delay is counterproductive to U.S. goals, including protecting the nation from terrorism and encouraging immigrants to become part of U.S. society by naturalizing. For more information, see the article at ([http://www.denverpost.com/movies/ci\\_4813326](http://www.denverpost.com/movies/ci_4813326)).

## **Tony Blair Stirs Controversy about Assimilation in Britain**

In early December, British Prime Minister Tony Blair stirred debate when he said it was the duty of immigrants to integrate into British society. Blair called on immigrants to embrace essential British values—"belief in democracy, the rule of law, tolerance, equal treatment for all, respect for this country and its shared heritage. . . . Our tolerance is part of what makes Britain, Britain. So conform to it—or don't come here. We don't want the hatemongers, whatever their race, religion or creed."

Blair's comments were part of an ongoing controversy in Britain over head scarves worn by Muslim women. Former Foreign Secretary Jack Straw in October said that he requested—but did not require—that Muslim women remove their veils in meetings in his office. A Muslim teaching assistant was suspended from her job for insisting on wearing the veil. Blair, at the same time he made his "duty to assimilate" comment, said referred to the head scarf controversy when he said it was "plain common sense that when it is an essential part of someone's work to communicate directly with people, being able to see their face is important."

Blair also announced that the government would more tightly control funds given to faith-based groups, requiring that such groups promote understanding among groups in order to receive government monies. He praised new laws requiring religious leaders immigrating to Britain to be able to speak English.