

2006-2007 Immigration Update 8

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President Bush Calls for Action on Immigration Reform by August

Speaking at a new border patrol station in Yuma, Arizona, President Bush recently called on Congress to act on immigration reform by August this year. The President stressed that to be effective, reform must be comprehensive. He outlined five objectives for comprehensive immigration policy reform:

- Securing the border.
- Creating a guest worker program.
- Holding employers responsible for the employees they hire.
- Resolving the status of the millions of unauthorized immigrants already in the country.
- Finding new ways to help newcomers assimilate into U.S. society.

More information on the President's remarks can be found at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/infocus/immigration/>.

Although the mood immediately after the mid-year elections in 2006 was optimistic, some pundits now believe that achieving comprehensive reform this year will be difficult, as members of Congress become less likely to compromise with the 2008 elections looming. To date, no progress is evident since the new Congress was sworn in in January. Two very different approaches (see the Washington Post's comparison at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/custom/2006/05/26/CU2006052600148.html>) are still being advocated by those on opposing sides of the issue.

Strange Match: DNA and Immigration

According to an April 10 article in the *Denver Post*, immigration officials are now using DNA testing to determine whether relatives for whom new U.S. citizens are seeking permission to immigrate are really biological relatives. The story, written by *New York Times* reporter Rachel Swarns, featured the story of Isaac Owusu, a new U.S. citizen from Ghana. Owusu, a widower, sought permission to bring his four children to the United States and willingly agreed to DNA testing because he believed it would speed the process of reuniting his family. To his surprise and dismay, only one of the four boys was actually his biological child. That son has been allowed to move to the United States; the other three have not. If the boys were under the age of 16, Owusu could adopt them, which would make them eligible for reunification. However, all three are over 16.

Needless to say, the DNA testing is controversial, as it is expensive (up to \$450 per family) and can cause family disintegration; yet officials argue that it can help families

who do not have the proper paperwork to document their relationship. Read the entire article at http://www.denverpost.com/search/ci_5630830.

Should Noncitizens Have the Right to Vote?

Until 1926, noncitizens could vote in 40 U.S. states and territories. In many areas, the vote was extended to noncitizens only in local elections, but some states allowed noncitizens to vote even in federal elections. Anti-immigrant sentiment and the aftereffects of World War I eventually led all states to restrict voting to U.S. citizens only.

Recently, some attention has again been given to the notion of allowing noncitizens to vote. In Chicago, any parent—whether citizen or not—can vote in local school council elections. In Takoma Park, Maryland, noncitizens can vote in local elections. While turnout for noncitizens was higher than for citizens in this suburb of Washington, DC, immediately after the passage of the 1992 law, results for a recent special election showed that not a single noncitizen voted.

Partially in response to some of the harsher reform measures be considered in Congress, New York, Boston, and some other municipalities are considering extending the vote to noncitizens. Advocates (see <http://www.immigrantvoting.org/>) say that giving noncitizens the vote will speed assimilation; opponents (see <http://www.ceousa.org/>) say that letting noncitizens vote removes an important incentive for becoming a citizen.

Pew Hispanic Center Releases Report on Naturalization Rates

In March, the Pew Hispanic Center released a report indicating that naturalization rates for immigrants are up. In 1995, 35 percent of immigrants eligible for naturalization actually sought to become citizens. In 2005, according to the Pew report, the number has risen to 52 percent. Immigrants with more education, higher levels of fluency in English, and higher incomes are more likely to seek naturalization, as are immigrants who are married and own their own homes. Immigrants who are from countries close to the United States who travel back and forth between the nations are less likely to become citizens. Still, the naturalization rate for immigrants from Mexico is up—from 20 percent in 1995 to 35 percent in 2005.

Pew researchers suggest a number of reasons for the higher rate of naturalization: increased tolerance for dual citizenship, changes in U.S. laws that limited rights of legal residents who are not citizens, the aging of the migrant population, and the current political climate. For more about the report, see <http://pewhispanic.org/reports/report.php?ReportID=74>.

Pennsylvania City's Ordinance Subject of Legal Case

The small town of Hazleton, Pennsylvania, in 2006 passed two ordinances designed to address perceived problems related to illegal immigration: one fined landlords who rent to unauthorized migrants and the other declared companies that employ unauthorized migrants ineligible for business permits. Other cities and towns across the country passed similar ordinances based on the Hazleton model.

In March, a lawsuit regarding the two Hazleton ordinances was heard in federal court in Scranton. The plaintiffs in the case, *Lozano v. City of Hazleton*, claim that the ordinances are unconstitutional, violating the Supremacy Clause, as well as due process and equal protection rights. City officials claim that the ordinances are an appropriate response to problems caused by illegal immigration and the federal government's failure to act. The judge in the case may take several months to rule.

For more information on the case, see

<http://jurist.law.pitt.edu/paperchase/2007/03/pennsylvania-city-illegal-immigration.php>.

Reducing “The Push” with Microcredit

Immigration is often described in terms of pushes and pulls—pushes are those factors (such as a poor economy or religious persecution) that cause people to leave their home countries, while pulls are those factors (such as good jobs or religious freedom) that draw people to another nation. Most of the debate around immigration reform deals with lessening the pulls that draw people to the United States. Yet some conversation does revolve around what could be done in “sender” countries to reduce the pushes propelling people towards the United States.

A March 26 article in *Time* magazine recounted an effort in one small community, Santa Cruz Mixtepec, to reduce the motivation for residents to head north. Using remittances—payments sent home by relatives laboring in the United States—and assistance from the Association of Mexican Social Sector Credit Unions, local women have started a microcredit bank offering business-starter loans in small amounts. Such loans, some observers argue, could be the engine that powers the entrepreneurial spirit among Mexicans who have previously not had access to financing.

Read the complete article at

<http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1600646,00.html/>.