

Trouble at the Border

U.S. Officials Target Illegal Immigration



Leigh Haeger

Has Rising Illegal Immigration Crossed the Line?

Antonio Cabrera huddles on a street corner, his hood pulled tight over his ears to block out the cold Colorado air. He shoves his hands deep in his coat pockets and chats quietly in Spanish with a few other men standing nearby.

Cabrera and the others are illegal immigrants. They come to this spot in Greeley, Colorado, every morning looking for work. Oftentimes, they find jobs that pay \$6 to \$10 an hour. Although their earnings are tax free, the wages are much lower than what U.S. citizens are paid.

Cabrera sends the money he earns to his family in Chihuahua, Mexico. Someday, he hopes, his wife and children will join him in the United States. "Here, I can afford to feed my five children," he told Colorado's *Vail Daily*.

Reading Passage

But bringing his family to the United States won't be easy. U.S. officials are cracking down on illegal immigration. Some people say illegal immigrants cost U.S. taxpayers millions of dollars and take jobs away from Americans.

"America is at risk," said U.S. Representative Tom Tancredo of Colorado in a recent speech in Iowa. "We need enforcement of our borders, enforcement of the law."

A Growing Problem



AFP

A group of Mexicans trying to immigrate to the U.S. walk along the two countries' border in Nogales, Arizona.

An estimated 3.7 million people have entered the United States illegally since 2001, according to a recent report by the Center for Immigration Studies. That brings the total number of illegal immigrants in the United States to an estimated 7 million to 11 million.

The report says that the period from 2000 to 2005 was the highest five-year period of immigration (both legal and illegal) in U.S. history. Almost half the new arrivals are thought to be here illegally. The majority of those people—about 57 percent—came from Mexico. Some 2.5 million others, or 23 percent, came from other Latin American countries.

Taking Action

Those rising numbers prompted President George W. Bush to propose a new immigration plan late last year. He called for adding 1,000 border guards, expanding fences in high-traffic areas, and increasing the use of advanced technology, such as unpiloted surveillance **drones**¹.

Several states are taking an even tougher stance on illegal immigration. Proposals include cutting off illegal immigrants' medical

¹ **drone:** aircraft operating without a pilot and controlled by radio signals

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care and giving police the power to arrest people for being in the country unlawfully.

Arizona Governor Janet Napolitano proposed posting more National Guard troops along her state's border, where many illegal immigrants cross into the United States from Mexico. Napolitano also called for tougher penalties for **fraudulent**² identification papers and for companies that hire illegal immigrants.

Help Wanted?

Not all proposals call for keeping illegal immigrants out. Bush is pushing for a controversial guest worker plan that would allow selected immigrants—including some who are already in the country illegally—to receive three-year work **visas**³ if they can prove they have an offer for a job that a U.S. citizen doesn't want. After three years, guest workers could apply for another visa or apply for citizenship or permanent residency status.

"The American people should not have to choose between [being] a welcoming society and a lawful society," Bush said during a recent speech in Arizona. "We can have both at the same time."

That proposal sounds good to Cabrera. He doesn't have any plans to return to Mexico. "I feel like I'm at home," he says.

Critical Thinking

An estimated 400 people died trying to cross into the United States from Mexico illegally in 2005, many from dehydration and heat exhaustion. Why might coming to the United States be worth the risk?

² **fraudulent**: forged, counterfeit; produced by dishonest means with the intention to mislead

³ **visa**: a mark on a passport that is a sign of approval and permission to enter or stay in another country