

## Policy Options: Guest Worker Program

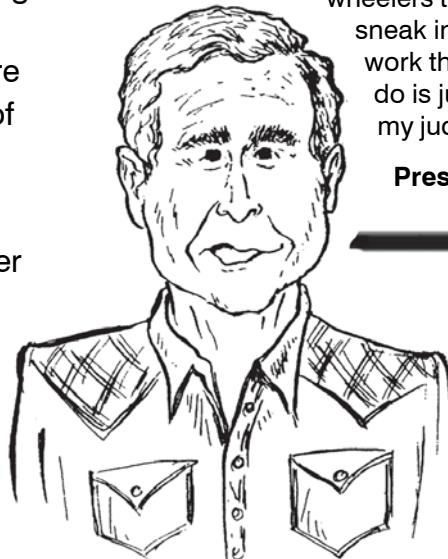
A guest worker program allows a certain number of people to work in some industries in the United States, pay income and payroll taxes, and, after a fixed period of time, go back to their country of origin. Some proposals in Congress don't include a guest worker program, but others do. There are many variations of guest worker proposals, but most would have to pay workers the "prevailing" wage (the going pay rate for the type of work to be done), would provide some worker protection under national, state, and local labor laws, allow workers to bring along their spouses and children under 21, and would allow people to change jobs. Most proposals don't guarantee health care coverage, and many people worry that it would create an unlimited "disposable" workforce, undermining protection and rights for all workers. The vast majority of guest workers would not be eligible for citizenship.

### Discussion Questions:

1. Do you think immigrants are taking jobs that Americans don't want? Which jobs? Which ones would Americans do? Under what conditions?
2. What do employers get out of hiring people without documents? How would legalizing the status of more immigrants change the situation of other workers?
3. Why do policies focus mainly on immigrants as workers? What other aspects of their lives are not being considered?
4. How might a program like this affect you or people that you know?

If you're going to come to do a job that an American won't do, you ought to be given a foolproof card that says you can come for a limited period of time and do work in a job an American won't do . . . The idea of having [tougher border controls] causes people to get stuffed in the back of 18-wheelers to risk their lives to sneak into America to do work that some people won't do is just not American, in my judgment.

**President Bush**



**For additional questions that help you think through different opinions, see *Questioning Immigration Proposals* on page 14.**



I think a guest worker program is good. What a lot of immigrants want is just to come and work for the season or temporarily, then go back to their countries with their families. Immigrants deserve benefits and worker protections because they work very hard. Because of the hard work they do we have fruit, vegetables, and a lot more things. They should at least be paid minimum wage or as much as the other workers.

**Maria Escobedo, Adult Education Student**

Immigrants must have the same rights that the citizens have while they are working. They should have equal pay, pay equal taxes, and have the same safe working conditions. After a period of time, if they are good people and if they want to, immigrants should have the right to become citizens.

**Melida Carillo,  
Adult Education Student**



I hear the media and politicians say that the illegal immigrants that are coming here are doing jobs that Americans don't want to do. This is not true. We would do the jobs if they were available and the pay was a living wage, with safe working conditions. Try listing [these jobs] in the paper instead of hiring through the back door.

**Roy Jones, Adult Education Student**



Illustrations by Ann Cleaves