George W. Bush Proposes an Amnesty

'Looking for love in all the wrong places'

by Diana Hull

The "steam" behind the new immigrant amnesty started building early last year. Illinois Congressman Luis Gutierrez proposed it in the form of a bill that delivered on President Clinton's promises to LULAC and MALDEF and the hundreds of groups that comprise the immigrant lobby.

"Illegal" is a pejorative word, so opposing illegal immigration is an easy position for elected officials to take. The hope is that by removing the onus of illegality by awarding an amnesty, the problem will go away, whereas actually doing something to stop the breaching of the U.S. border, is another matter entirely.

Because elected officials failed to act decisively, amnesty for illegal immigrants was first sold to the public in 1986 as a way of solving this difficult problem once and for all.

That was the supposed motive fifteen years ago when there were five million illegal immigrants in the United States, and that is claimed to be the motive today when there are eleven million illegal immigrants living among us.

But amnesties do not solve and only exacerbate the problem of illegal entry and increase rather than deter

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illegal immigration. That was the conclusion reached in an INS report of 12 October 2000 and subsequently ignored — an analysis released almost immediately after former INS Commissioner Doris Meissner resigned.

But despite this acknowledged policy failure that has changed California and the rest of the United States forever, our new President and his advisors are pushing for more of the same.

The only difference between the political parties on this issue is that Bill Clinton was sneaky in the way that he pursued it and tried to tack amnesty provisions onto unrelated congressional bills. For President Clinton amnesty was a promised payback to Hispanic supporters, but for George Bush, amnesty is fueled by a fantasy that he can seduce the Latino electorate.

In the case of both men, the wishes of the American people on this issue are as nothing to either of them, and they care not a whit about the "too many people" problem.

But what, if any, crisis will yet another amnesty resolve, and what new turmoil will be created by national leaders still looking for love in all the wrong places?

In addition to the fact that most Americans oppose it, there are other reasons to question the legitimacy of amnesty as a tool of immigration policy. The record is completely absent any history of rewards being used effectively in place of deterrence. Are immigration violations a special case where reverse motivation applies?

Before 1986, there were only three prior amnesties in all of US history. In 1865 and again in 1868, President Andrew Johnson granted amnesty to the supporters of the Confederacy. Then, almost a hundred years later, in 1977, President Carter forgave the draft resisters who had gone to live abroad during the Viet Nam war.

The purpose of these earlier amnesties was to heal internal rifts between the government and its own citizens — an attempt to bring together Americans torn apart by

deeply held political differences. In those instances amnesties were successful in closing the book on specific internal wars and rebellions.

All three of these earlier amnesties were a one time forgiving, and hopefully forgetting, whereas recent amnesties have brought no reconciliation, only demands for more amnesties while inviting more of the behavior that prompted the forgiving in the first place.

The 1986 IRCA Amnesty was, in more ways than one, the "mother"' of the amnesty now being considered by the Bush administration. It was a program that fostered dishonesty in the recipients. It was originally intended for farm workers — a program that wildly underestimated the number of applicants who would apply for legalization, was the impetus for the ubiquitous counterfeit documents in circulation today, and failed totally to remove the magnet of jobs as promised. *New York Times* writer Robert Suro called the 1986 amnesty the most massive case of immigration fraud ever perpetrated on the American people.

So, do we really need to repeat this experience again? And how did *failure* like this create a precedent for what has become a continuing series of similar legislation?

The lesson is that forgiving and forgetting can only be successful when the parties involved have significant ties to each other — ties more important than the struggle that separates them.

Considering that amnesty is not an appropriate strategy for solving illegal entry, solutions lie rather in insisting our borders and laws are respected. We need to rein in our super-indulgent society that tolerates cheating and where continuing amnesties have simply become the ultimate immigrant entitlement program. We shouldn't have to be opposing one amnesty after another. How about stopping the misapplication of the amnesty concept, which should never have been applied to illegal aliens in the first place? And let's remove that warm cuddling wrap that surrounds the word "amnesty" — wrong for a policy associated with so much treachery and so many abuses.

If the continuing demand for agricultural workers remains an issue, it would be a bargain in the end for government to make a major investment in advanced robotics technology for farmers.

We don't pick cotton by hand anymore, and instead of amnesties, we could modernize the way we get fruit off a tree and produce out of the ground. But we'll never invent advanced machinery so long as people are cheaper than technology, another reason to label amnesty such a regressive social policy.   •

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