

Amnesty and Culture

Problems arise when immigrants refuse to assimilate

by Rep. Ron Paul (R-TX)

The dictionary defines amnesty as a general pardon for offenders by a government, and the Bush administration's new proposal to grant legal status to millions of illegal aliens surely meets that definition. Millions of people who broke the law by entering, staying, and working in our country will not be punished, but rather rewarded with a visa. This is amnesty, plain and simple. Lawbreakers are given legal status, while those seeking to immigrate legally face years of paperwork and long waits for a visa.

The president claims that America lacks the political will to deport the eight to twelve million illegal aliens already here, so we have no choice but to grant them visas. But what message does this send to the rest of the world? If we reward millions who came here illegally, surely millions more will follow suit. Ten years from now we will be in the same position, with a

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whole new generation of lawbreakers seeking amnesty. The Bush administration proposal does not provide a coherent immigration policy, nor does it address the urgent need for stricter control of our borders. The overwhelming majority of Americans – including legal immigrants – want immigration reduced, not expanded.

The immigration problem fundamentally is a welfare state problem. Some illegal immigrants – certainly not all – receive housing subsidies, food stamps, free medical care, and other forms of welfare. This alienates taxpayers and breeds suspicion of immigrants, even though the majority of them work very hard. Without a welfare state, we would know that everyone coming to America wanted to work hard and support himself. Since we have accepted a permanent welfare state, however, we cannot be surprised when some freeloaders and criminals are attracted to our shores. Welfare muddies the question of why immigrants want to come here.

Illegal immigrants also threaten to place a tremendous strain on federal social entitlement programs. Under the Bush proposal, millions of illegal immigrants will qualify for Social

Security and other programs – programs that already threaten financial ruin for America in the coming decades. Adding millions of foreign citizens to the Social Security, Medicare, and disability

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rolls will only hasten the inevitable day of reckoning. Social Security is in serious trouble already, and sending benefits abroad to millions of illegal aliens who once worked here will cost hundreds of millions or even billions of dollars. Every American who hopes to collect Social Security someday should stridently oppose the President's proposal.

Financial considerations aside, we cannot continue to ignore the cultural aspects of immigration. The vast majority of Americans welcome immigrants who want to come here, work hard, and build a better life. This is a basic human desire that Americans understand, especially when so many immigrants are born into hopeless poverty in their own nations. But

we rightfully expect immigrants to show a sincere desire to become American citizens, speak English, and assimilate themselves culturally. More importantly, we expect immigrants to respect our political and legal traditions, which are rooted in liberty and constitutionally limited government. After all, a lack of respect for the rule of law causes much of the poverty around the world that immigrants seek to escape.

Problems arise when immigrants refuse to assimilate and show little interest in becoming American citizens. 100 years ago, immigrants arrived in America after dangerous journeys fully prepared to embrace their new country. In most cases, returning home was not an option. Most led very hard lives, took pride in American citizenship, and asked for nothing but the opportunity to work. Today, however, some immigrants travel between

countries frequently, enjoying the benefits of America but showing no desire to become Americans. Some even display hostility toward America and our ideals, joining the chorus of voices demanding that the United States become a multicultural society that rejects our own history. It is this cultural conflict that soon must be addressed, and the president's amnesty proposal simply turns a blind eye to the problem. •