

Mexicans chide U.S. over immigration

The Miami Herald
Jun. 29, 2007

MEXICO CITY --

Opinion makers and migrant advocates in Mexico said Friday that the collapse of U.S. immigration reform plans hurts Mexican workers, U.S. employers and anti-terrorism efforts.

President Bush's plan to legalize as many as 12 million unlawful immigrants from around the world while fortifying the border failed in the Senate on Thursday.

"This is very bad news for Mexican migrants in the U.S.," said Jorge Bustamante, special rapporteur to the U.N. human rights commission for migrants. "It means the continuation and probably a worsening of the migrants' vulnerable conditions."

The Rev. Luis Kendziersky, director of a shelter for migrants in the border city of Tijuana, said U.S. senators appeared to be "focused more on the political game than on the real needs of the people."

"According to polls, the majority of the people (in the U.S.) want legality with concessions for undocumented migrants, but the radicals make a lot of noise," he said.

Some major newspapers called the Senate's action hypocritical.

"It's obvious that the politicians of that country want laborers, but they are not willing to legalize the labor that they need," El Universal said in an editorial.

Migrants "will continue to be subjected to extraordinary means of discrimination," the daily paper said, adding that a "subculture of illegality" in border crossings also does nothing to aid the U.S. fight against terrorism.

An editorial in the left-leaning La Jornada called the decision a "triple shipwreck" - a failure for the Bush administration, the United States and Mexican President Felipe Calderon.

"The most powerful country on the planet will have to continue living, for many more months, with the scandalous contradiction between its laws and the real needs of its economy, thirsty for cheap labor to guarantee the international competitiveness of its exports, especially in agriculture."

At a regional summit in Belize, Calderon and Central American leaders approved a resolution urging U.S. lawmakers to reconsider the bill, saying the lack of a reform "worsens illegal migration."

Calderon has been less vocal in demanding immigration reform than was his predecessor Vicente Fox, whose campaign for changes in U.S. policy failed.

The president instead has focused on strengthening Mexico's economy to stem the flow of workers north, while criticizing the 700-mile (1,130-kilometer) barrier Congress approved to increase security on the border with Mexico.

Authorities on both sides of the border estimate that more than 11 million Mexicans live in the United States, as many of 6 million of them illegally.

Not everyone in Mexico was disappointed by the death of the bill, which would have created a system to weed out illegal workers from U.S. jobs.

Al Rojas, spokesman for the advocacy group Front of Mexicans Abroad, said the law "would have imposed prejudices, treating migrants like criminals and judging them."

"Faced with a bad law, we preferred that they approved nothing," he said in a telephone interview.

Roberto Heatley, a 61-year-old engineering consultant from Mexico City, said it was "a shame that they don't pay due attention to this problem in the United States."

"Delaying it until 2009 does not solve the problem."