

# Enforcement alone will not solve U.S. immigration crisis

The Miami Herald  
Nov. 08, 2007

**MEXICO CITY** -- As was to be expected, a new U.S. congressional study saying that U.S. customs officers fail to stop thousands of undocumented workers a year at airports and other legal entry points has added fuel to U.S. anti-immigration zealots' anxiety levels. This time, their concerns are legitimate.

Before we get into why several Hispanic-allergic U.S. cable television anchormen who are building their ratings on anti-immigration crusades can't be blamed for being alarmed over the study results, even if the enforcement-only solutions they advocate are nonsensical, let's look at the findings of the Government Accountability Office (GAO), which is the investigative arm of Congress, report released earlier this week.

According to the GAO study, overstretched U.S. Customs and Border Protection officers at U.S. airports, seaports and border crossing points are failing to prevent "several thousands" of undocumented immigrants, including drug smugglers and weapons violators, from entering the United States every year. The Washington Post said about 20,000 undocumented immigrants were mistakenly allowed into the country at legal entry points last year.

This, in addition to the hundreds of thousands of people entering U.S. territory through unpatrolled border areas every year, and the estimated 13 million undocumented immigrants already in the United States, is drawing new calls for stricter border controls.

## **BORDER PATROL FOCUS**

The Bush administration, after failing to get Congress to approve an immigration bill that would have both tightened controls at the border and allowed an earned path to legalization to millions of undocumented immigrants, is now focusing on increasing the Border Patrol to 18,000 agents and completing a 700-mile fence along the 2,000-mile long Mexican border by the end of next year.

There is no question that the U.S. immigration system needs to be fixed. Especially since the 2001 terrorist attacks, the United States needs to control who gets into the country and to know who is already in it. In that sense, the new GAO study cannot be dismissed as another product of the ongoing anti-immigration hype.

But even U.S. Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff admitted Tuesday to reporters in Washington that enforcement-only solutions will never stop the flow of undocumented immigrants as long as countries south of the U.S. border don't create enough jobs.

Chertoff called on Congress to give the legalization bill another chance, tacitly admitting that the deportation of millions of people living in the shadows is unfeasible.

In his new book, *Ex-Mex: From Migrants to Immigrants*, former Mexican Foreign Minister Jorge Castañeda argues that Mexico should share in the responsibility of patrolling the U.S. border, something that is vehemently opposed by Mexican nationalists.

'Mexico has to step up to the plate on this, but only in the context of an overall agreement that includes legalization, expanded temporary workers' programs, border security on both sides, and border development," Castañeda told me in an interview Tuesday. "Otherwise, it would be politically untenable in Mexico."

While Mexico's old-guard nationalists argue that the Mexican constitution prohibits the government from limiting its citizens' freedom of movement, Castañeda argues that Mexico's Federal Population Law requires that people leave the country with proper authorizations from both the Mexican government and their destination countries, and that they do it through authorized exit points. Mexico could apply its existing laws in the framework of a wider deal, he said.

### **DISINCENTIVES**

There are other things that Mexico should do, he said, such as creating a system of rewards and disincentives in Mexico's migrant-sending communities, whereby those who stay can receive tax incentives or micro-loans to start small businesses, and those who leave may lose land tenure or social security rights. Also, Mexico could do a better job patrolling its southern border, he added.

My opinion: I agree. While anti-immigration zealots are right in being concerned about unchecked immigration, they are totally unrealistic -- and often driven by xenophobia -- when they argue that this can be done with enforcement-only measures, without Mexico's help, and without greater economic cooperation with Mexico and the rest of Latin America to help the region raise its living standards, and reduce people's desire to seek a better life abroad.

As I have often said in this column, a rising tide lifts all boats, whereas isolationism and protectionism will reduce trade and make us all poorer.