



AMERICANS FOR TAX REFORM

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President

**Testimony of Grover Norquist, President of Americans for Tax Reform,
to the Senate Judiciary Committee, September 7, 2001**

I thank you for your kind invitation to speak about an issue that should remind us all of what our country represents. Reexamining our approach to Mexican immigration is, of course, timely, but it is also an important opportunity for us to contemplate what makes the United States so special, and how pivotal our relationship with Mexico is for the long-term economic vitality of the entire Western Hemisphere.

A nation of immigrants

Almost all Americans can trace their roots to another country, or several countries. Most modern nations have sizable shares of residents who are either recent immigrants or descendants of immigrants. But the United States has historically been, and in my opinion should continue to be, the favored destination of those around the world who seek a better life for themselves and their families. Immigrants benefit from the chance to work hard and succeed, and the United States benefits from their contribution to our economy and society. Our increasingly multi-ethnic nation has grown stronger as it has become more diverse, with all its people bound together by a shared belief in the Constitution and the freedom it guarantees.

The United States is a marvelous place indeed, and it's only getting better.

So one could hardly blame Mexicans for looking towards the north for opportunity. Although Mexico is quickly becoming a flourishing nation (thanks in no small part to NAFTA), it is understandable why many are so willing to risk entering this country illegally: the grass is greener on our side of the border at the moment.

But it is also imperative that we should allow them to come to the United States legally, and return to Mexico as frequently as necessary: doing so would have the ultimate effect of reducing the constant pressure now exerted on the other side of our southern border. This pressure is expensive to combat, and counterproductive to the existing positive relationship between the United States and Mexico. It would make far more sense for this pressure to simply be relieved.

Many Mexicans want to work in the United States temporarily, with the ability to regularly return to Mexico on occasion. But getting into the United States illegally keeps them here indefinitely, because under current law the hazards of frequently exiting and reentering are too great.

Our best course of action would be to maintain the strength and integrity of our border, but allow it to become more flexible. This can be achieved through expanding temporary worker programs, increasing cross-border mobility, and extending permanent legal residency-but not necessarily citizenship-to those who qualify.

We would all be well served to remember that our neighbors in Mexico would be coming here to work, not to go on welfare. And although many of them would have no desire to become American citizens, it would be a credit to the American Way to offer them the option. Doubtlessly, we welcome them to join us in our shared pursuit of happiness.

I am pleased to see that interest groups across the political spectrum (even the AFL-CIO) are becoming less hostile to immigration. As a nation, we are more welcoming than ever before, but we still have much progress to make. Giving Mexican workers a chance to live the American Dream, or simply earn a fleeting glimpse of it if they so choose, would be an enormous advance in and of itself, and is the right thing to do.

People are the ultimate natural resource

The United States is a vast place, and compared to a great many other countries, especially those in Europe, it has a very low overall population density. There is ample space to accommodate newcomers, and there is now, as ever, a pressing need to allow immigrants to help us realize our nation's maximum potential. With many jobs begging to be filled, and many Mexicans willing to do them, it's in our national interest to establish a coherent framework whereby the needs of employers and their prospective employees can be satisfied, despite differences of nationality.

Make no mistake: immigrants do not take jobs from citizens, they create jobs for all of us by doing the hard work that increases our nation's productive capacities, which in turn fuels economic growth. A rising tide lifts all boats, including a multinational tide.

I would be remiss were I not to address here the false issue of "urban sprawl". Now called "anti-sprawl legislation", it used to be called "snob zoning". Its goal was the same then as it is now: to keep "them" out of "our" neighborhood. Overcoming this odd obsession that afflicts far too many policymakers is as important as legalizing the honest work of immigrants. After all, they need places to live, and as I already noted, there is plenty of physical space in this expansive country for them. Anti-sprawl laws and regulations not only cause unjustifiable hassles for citizens seeking to find suitable housing, they act as barriers to immigration by reducing the potential housing stock.

We should treat immigrants with the same dignity as we treat citizens

Our policies concerning immigration should be consistent with our nation's commitment to civil liberties. The United States was founded on a belief that all people have certain inalienable rights that no government has the authority to confer or the power to rescind. Aggressively rounding up "suspicious" immigrants and summarily sending them back without giving them a fair chance to demonstrate how they can make a valuable contribution to their host's commonwealth is evocative of totalitarianism. Granting them legal residency, even temporarily, is not just humane, it's American.

During the latter stages and aftermath of World War II, through an plan widely known as "Operation Keelhaul", the United States allowed thousands upon thousands of brave people who succeeded in reaching Western Europe after fleeing Stalin's emerging Soviet Bloc to be forcibly repatriated at the Communists' insistence. While I am most certainly not comparing the Mexico of today to the Russia of old, the principle still applies: it's wrong to close the door to opportunity on those who have risked all to pass through it and send them back from whence they came.

Are we to take an Operation Keelhaul approach to these Mexican immigrants? Or any other category of immigrants for that matter? Could our consciences permit us?

Hemispheric free trade: getting from here to there

Our nation is about to embrace a path to prosperity that will reach from the Canadian Yukon to Cape Horn. By enacting a free trade zone throughout the Western Hemisphere, we will dramatically improve the lives of all who live within it. Taking a more sensible approach to freeing the movement of labor is a crucial component of making hemispheric free trade possible.

Admittedly, labor mobility is not the *sine qua non* of hemispheric free trade: that honor belongs exclusively to Trade Promotion Authority. Empowering President Bush (and every president after him, for that matter)

with Trade Promotion Authority will ultimately make labor mobility throughout the hemisphere less of a concern by eliminating the punitive taxes on imports that kill job creation in developing nations and close access to markets to our south.

Nevertheless, without a few changes to our labor laws sooner rather than later, Americans won't enjoy the widespread benefits of hemispheric free trade as quickly as we would have otherwise. And there's nothing more expensive than the wasted time that causes opportunities to be lost.

Although granting special status to Mexican immigrants may be touted by some to be a slight against immigrants from Central and South America, it's best to view this as a necessary first step towards those with whom we share an immediate physical border, much like our bilateral free trade pact with Canada was a necessary precursor for NAFTA. If we don't make the modest effort needed to lay a foundation now, future measures aimed at establishing a hemispheric free trade zone will be all the more difficult.