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Bush Renews Push for Immigrant-Worker Plan

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WASHINGTON, Oct. 18 - President Bush vowed on Tuesday to get tough on illegal immigrants even as he urged Congress to adopt a temporary-worker program that would allow some to remain in the [United States](#) for as long as six years.

"We're going to get control of our borders," Mr. Bush said in the White House East Room just before signing a \$32 billion domestic security bill that has big increases for the Border Patrol, including money for 1,000 new agents and improved technology. "We'll make this country safer for all our citizens."

Mr. Bush added, "If somebody is here illegally, we've got to do everything we can to find them." Once illegal immigrants are caught, he said, they must be "returned to their home countries as soon as possible."

Mr. Bush's words, among his most insistent on illegal immigrants to date, were intended to calm conservatives upset at his temporary-worker plan, which a number of Republicans view as an amnesty program. Mr. Bush first proposed the plan in January 2004, but it has run into resistance.

In a renewed effort to win support, the White House is now emphasizing the border enforcement part of the plan, but at the same time insisting that enforcement can work only as a part of what Mr. Bush on Tuesday called "a larger, comprehensive immigration reform program."

Similar sentiments were voiced earlier in the day by Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff and Labor Secretary Elaine L. Chao, who told the Senate Judiciary Committee that increasing enforcement along the nation's borders would not alone repair the nation's immigration system. They urged the adoption of a temporary-worker program.

"This is a system desperately in need of repair," Mr. Chertoff said. "And the fact of the matter is people are rightly upset and distressed about the prospect that we do not have control of our border the way we should."

Under the plan proposed by Mr. Bush, certain illegal immigrants already in the United States would pay a fee and then be given a temporary worker visa good for up to three years, with an option to renew it for three more. After the six years, they would have to leave the country, Ms. Chao said. A worker would need to apply for the program with an employer as a sponsor if the employer had a job that no American could be found to take.

"By addressing the economic forces that drive immigration, we can meet employers' need for workers, provide appropriate legal channels for foreign-born workers to access opportunity and allow enforcement resources to be targeted on the critical mission of border security," Ms. Chao said.

Mr. Bush, who was immersed in immigration issues as governor of [Texas](#) and has promoted his plan in part as an appeal to politically important Hispanic voters, cast the problem from the point of view of illegal immigrants themselves.

"You see, we got people sneaking into our country to work," he said. "They want to provide for their families. Family values do not stop at the Rio Grande River. People are coming to put food on the table. But because there is no legal way for them to do so, through a temporary-worker program, they're putting pressure on our border."

But even as Mr. Bush and his two cabinet members made their pitches, members of both parties were questioning the president's plan.

Senator Tom Coburn, Republican of [Oklahoma](#), asked Mr. Chertoff how the administration could enforce the requirement that temporary workers leave after six years.

Senator Dianne Feinstein, Democrat of [California](#), said the talk of such a temporary-worker program was spurring even more illegal immigration to the United States.

Other Democrats, including Senator Richard J. Durbin of [Illinois](#), pressed Ms. Chao about why the Bush administration program did not simply offer a way for illegal immigrants to become permanent legal residents.

And Senator Jeff Sessions, Republican of [Alabama](#), said that at least for now, the administration should first prove that it could improve enforcement of the borders, where more than one million people were apprehended in the last fiscal year trying to cross illegally.

"Are you going to get busy now to enforce existing law?" Mr. Sessions asked.

Mr. Chertoff said that the Homeland Security Department, which includes Immigration and Customs and Enforcement as well as the Border Patrol, was not waiting for a temporary-worker program.

The department, for example, is moving to finish work on a border fence near San Diego, hiring the 1,000 additional Border Patrol officers provided for in the measure signed by Mr. Bush and looking for ways to accelerate the deportation of illegal immigrants.

The law also includes money for more than 1,900 additional beds in detention centers, bringing the total to nearly 20,000. In addition, it provides \$139 million to improve border technology and intelligence capabilities, \$82 million to improve and expand Border Patrol stations, and \$70 million to install and improve border fencing, lighting and roads.

In his remarks to the Judiciary Committee, Mr. Chertoff repeated that the effort would be hampered if Congress did not help the administration reduce the incentive for people to enter illegally.

"It's a three-legged stool," Mr. Chertoff said. "It requires tough enforcement at the border, tough interior enforcement and a temporary-worker program to deal with the very real draw."