

Consider immigration reforms

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Mexico, which seems to be our only ally after some U.S. diplomatic blunders, is in a favorable bargaining position and will soon be pressing for concessions in immigration.

We should counter with some well-thought-out policies.

The emigration of Mexicans to the United States functions as a safety valve for the economy south of the border and, at the same time, is a boon for the U.S. economy.

Mexico's unemployment woes are lessened by the exodus of workers, and the *remesa*, money remitted home by immigrants, makes up Mexico's largest single income source.

In the United States, immigrant labor makes buying processed foods and butchered meats, constructing homes, maintaining buildings, taking care of the elderly and other services more affordable.

The cooling of the U.S. economy will not decrease the flow of immigrants on the northward trek.

On the contrary, the economic slowdown will exacerbate the "push" forces in Mexico and bring more workers northward.

The Center of Immigration Studies (<http://www.cis.org>) furnishes an excellent forum on some of these issues.

Arguing for a new immigration policy, Harvard scholar George Borjas suggests the U.S. economy use basic technology to select highly skilled immigrants for continued growth.

In a similar line, Vernon M. Briggs Jr., professor at Cornell University, notes that admitting more unskilled workers discourages full utilization and development of the American work force.

Others, including Richard M. Lamm, professor at University of Denver, and former U.S. Sen. Alan Simpson have expressed serious reservations about the changing cultural face of the nation.

Although these concerns have some validity, they may not be realistic.

The development of immigration policies must take place in concert with economic forces, which dictate the push and pull of immigration.

Our current immigration policies attempt to deal with need in too limited a way. We must look at reform from a broader perspective.

For example, the nation admits relatives of immigrants already here legally under a family unification policy. Periodically, too, it accepts the reality of longtime immigrants under amnesty procedures.

These measures make immigration policy more humane and, to some extent, more realistic.

Critics claim that these measures permit government to exceed the legal limits and, as such, go against the intent of lawmakers who sought to control immigration.

These critics often reiterate the call to “just enforce the laws” and decry that “the border is out of control.”

But these objections are practically meaningless, since the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service is doing its best with only minimal success. We would have to cordon the border with the Army, a move most Americans are not willing to take.

What’s more, we need those laborers so badly that some parts of the country and some segments of the economy, for all practical purposes, recruit Mexican workers although it’s against the law.

One solution proposed by some immigration scholars and politicians is a new guest-worker plan. The last such plan, the Bracero Program (1942–1964), was froth with injustices, but many prefer that to opening the border.

But restrictions can be loosened without completely opening the border, according to Kevin R. Johnson, professor of law at the University of California at Davis.

Johnson proposes we add other provisions beyond family unification and amnesty, such as educational attainment and employment skills — a point system similar to Canada’s.

In fact, Johnson advocates formally upping the legal limits to 2 million new immigrants per year, a factor of 1 percent of the nation’s population, which he claims would be easily sustainable.

Johnson also calls for an end to the Diversity Visa Program, which grants favored status to immigrants from Europe, artificially admitting 55,000 newcomers from that part of the world in a not-so-subtle effort to “whiten” new immigration.

These are sound, though piecemeal, reforms that are in the nation’s best interests — and they will be good counteroffers when Mexico presses for more concessions