

The Charlotte Post

The Voice of the Black Community

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EDITORIALS

Secure the border, then enforcement

President Bush's address Monday on immigration to the U.S. raised some eyebrows and concerns on all sides of the debate. His decision to post 6,000 National Guard troops at the U.S.-Mexico border is at best a stop-gap measure to show at least some resolve to shutting off the spigot to illegal entry from the south. In other corners, troops at the border signal a balkanization pitting American haves against Mexican have-nots.



Bush

Immigration proponents and Mexican President Vicente Fox have expressed concerns that the beefed-up patrols militarize the border and increase the danger of bloodshed.

But America has to get a grip on immigration, and improving border security is but a small, albeit important first step. America's previous official response has been next to no response at all, leaving the nation a swinging gate to anyone with enough stealth, determination or money to get in without detection. Even if individuals were somehow caught, it was more nuisance than deterrent. That needs to end.

Putting troops at America's doorsteps at least signals a start in how the country deals with immigration issues, but more needs to be done than adding armed force to the equation. Immigration law is a hedgepodge that fails through its antiquities and lax enforcement.

On Capitol Hill, Republicans — facing intense pressure from their constituents to revamp immigration law — are split over how best to approach the issue. Last year, the House of Representatives passed a bill that would criminalize illegal immigration and put the border in virtual lockdown. The Senate is haggling over its own version, which would likely include provisions for more than 11 million immigrants to stay in the U.S. and work towards citizenship. It's a slippery slope, but Congress and the executive branch need to find enough political will and muscle to deliver fair and just legislation.

A temporary guest worker program may also be part of a far-reaching program, but that poses issues as well. Native-born Americans, and African Americans specifically, are nervous that unchecked immigration has the potential to drive up black unemployment, which is traditionally at least twice that of whites. Not all of these unemployed folks are looking for jobs, but it would stand to reason that if better-paying jobs on the bottom of the employment ladder were available, their chances would improve.

That's where the real battle begins — can business and government resolve potential conflicts over illegals who'll work for lower wages. To prevent the exploitation of undocumented immigrants, we support tougher penalties for businesses that hire them and in the case of government, withdraw contracts from businesses that do.

Despite the popular perception, immigration isn't about Latinos, the group most likely to be impacted by change. America has a difficult time keeping track of visitors who come to this country on a visa, only to conveniently forget to leave when it expires. They're coming from Africa, Asia and Europe in addition to Central and South America. With no enforcement, they've melted into the American fabric as well, mostly as productive, albeit illegal threads of the nation's mosaic.

We should welcome all who aim to become citizens through legal means. Exploiting individuals who are here out of economic desperation is criminal, and those who do should be held accountable as well. But first things first. Get a grip on the border. That's an act of self-preservation and national security.

Continue the drive for subsidized housing

Affordable housing is a misleading term, namely because it's so literal. For the poor, affordable takes on a totally different meaning, because it's so difficult to obtain in Charlotte. Publicly-financed housing can only go so far, which causes some consternation among advocates for the poor, who feel Charlotte's housing market is so driven by the bottom line that it's lost any compassion.

That's not to say the effort isn't being put forth. The Charlotte Housing Authority is developing communities where low-income and middle-class residents can live side-by-side. It's a novel approach, but the jury is still out in terms of its effectiveness. The concept, which has been implemented in Atlanta, Dallas, Texas and San Francisco, with varying degrees of success, is simple: the homes look middle-class, the neighborhoods are upscale. Who wouldn't want to be part of that? The problem is that not enough support can be marshalled to grow these communities.

Developers and lenders, who are in business to maximize profit and minimize risk, haven't fallen over themselves to get into the mixed-income movement. When they do, lower-income residents are wary that the profit motive is what will likely price them out of subsidized communities when more money can be made at market rate. In essence, there's a possibility that a community that starts with a 50-50 mix of low-income and middle income could quickly turn into a gentrified neighborhood.

But that's a risk worth taking, and Charlotte has done so with good results for those fortunate enough to land a home. More needs to be done to build momentum for publicly-financed housing as the city continues to grow. The old model of barracks-style apartments that sprouted during World War II is a thing of the past. A safer, more efficient model of housing is not only good for the poor among us, it's better for the community as a whole.



Bush lied about U.S. spy program

After the New York Times disclosed the existence of a domestic spy program in December, President Bush



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He said, "In other words, one end of the communication must be outside of the United States."

Thanks to an investigation by USA Today, we now know that President Bush was lying. In a front-page story last Thursday, the newspaper wrote: "The National Security Agency has been secretly collecting the phone call records of tens of millions of Americans, using data provided by AT&T, Verizon and BellSouth, people with direct knowledge of the arrangement told USA Today." Qwest was the only telephone company that refused to voluntarily turn over its records.

Believed to be the largest database ever assembled in the world, the telephone companies turned over records of millions of citizens — most of whom were not suspected of any illegal activity — to the super-secret National

Security Agency, ostensibly to help fight terrorism.

The three largest telephone companies provide land and cellular service to more than 200 million customers in every state. Under the plan disclosed by USA Today, a record of every telephone call made to and from a U.S. residence or business was given to the NSA, allowing them to examine any calling patterns. The program was initiated shortly after the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York, the Pentagon and an attempted hijacking over Pennsylvania. President Bush authorized the program with an executive order.

No one objects to law enforcement officials tracking terrorists, but it is clear that this administration is using 9/11 and the subsequent passage of the Patriot Act as an excuse to violate our constitutionally-protected right to privacy and sidestep the checks-and-balances routinely provided by the judicial and legislative branches of government.

It is equally disturbing that the telephone companies would go along with this scheme. In the past, law enforcement officials were required to obtain a court warrant before obtaining such sensitive information. But after 9/11, the telecommunications companies caved

in and provided millions of records to NSA.

In addition to offering "directory assistance," the Big Three are offering the government "direct assistance." Except in cases where warrants have been issued, the phone companies should hang-up on such request. Send the NSA a disconnect notice when it tries to pry into the personal lives of law-abiding citizens.

Because intelligence agencies have been asked to work more closely in the wake of 9/11, there is a good chance that some of the data collected by NSA will also end up in the hands of the FBI and CIA.

NSA specializes in intercepting and decoding international communications. It's such a top-secret agency that for years, many officials would not even acknowledge its existence.

In another false assurance, the agency points out that it collected calling information, not identifying information of the callers. That's hardly reassuring. Anyone beyond the age of children watching Saturday morning cartoons knows that NSA, credit bureaus and mass marketers can link the telephone numbers to other personal information, such as names, addresses and Social Security numbers. It's not enough to violate our privacy, they also

take us for fools and think that we don't know about what they call data mining.

The executive branch has the tools it needs to capture terrorists. To protect citizens' 4th Amendment right against "unreasonable searches and seizures," the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court was established in 1978. The court, a panel of federal judges, meets in secret and issues warrants in national security cases. The judges rarely turn down a request by the government and federal officials even have the authority to conduct a search and apply for a warrant later.

Still, the Bush administration complains that going through the FISA does not allow it to act quickly on national security matters, a charge disputed by those familiar with the workings of FISA.

As we have seen with the Patriot Act, standing up to those who would run roughshod over our 4th Amendment rights is an issue that unites progressives, conservatives and libertarians. And this is the time for citizens to stand up to our government and the telephone companies that now sell us out — literally.

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Illegal immigrants overrun heartland

On May 8, I was buying a newspaper at a Wawa in Claymont, Del., when an elderly Euro-American male and I were taken aback by the heading on a front page article in the News Journal newspaper that read, "Jobs are there for immigrant workers. Employers want ID, but no questions asked."

It was clear that illegal alien (undocumented workers) cheap labor and potential future membership in various organizations are making a mockery of enforcing the U.S. immigration laws.



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one my age."

Civil rights era blacks know that one of yesterday's dreaded civil rights combatants was often the small town sheriff that many black folks suspected was a member of the White Citizens Council, the Ku Klux Klan. Hence, the following quote from today's Georgetown, Del., chief of police William Topping, in the News Journal, ought be etched in stone for it suggests that Topping is delirious in his duty.

"I tell everyone I talk to, whether they like hearing it or not, that if illegal immigrants had to leave, many

industries would be badly hit

and it may take a while for them to recover," Topping said. "I know I wouldn't want to work at Perdue and do the jobs immigrants do." This comment offers legitimacy to the exploitation of illegal immigrant labor for yesterday's black Americans did these low level jobs long before illegal immigrants arrived. Today's difference is that black American citizens have made the transition from chattel to human beings, so employers now must pay an adequate wage.

I recall helping some black domestic workers in Wilmington, Del., in the early Nineteen Seventies go after getting paid minimum wage salaries. These ladies liked their domestic jobs, but they wanted at least to earn a minimum wage salary versus being perceived as quasi-modern day slaves.

What is maddening in this illegal immigration debate is to see The White House and U.S. Congress suggesting a decriminalization of illegal immigration thereby offering a competitive advantage to over 11 million illegal immigrants in the economic mainstream over Black White and other American citizens possessing felony convictions. On the other hand, we ought to ask ourselves who is showing compassion for the old people and children left behind in the dying villages that the childbearing-aged illegal immigrants abandoned in

their native land.

I shared my disdain on the current state of illegal immigration with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. I had hoped that they would see the wisdom in using some tough-love to solve this problem.

My compromise was, "...The U.S. Congressional leadership... must make illegal immigration a felony offense for both the illegal alien and his or her employer to take away any competitive advantage these illegal immigrants will have on native born American citizens. On the other hand, if the U.S. Congress is afraid to make illegal immigration a felony offense, they can pass a law that expunges the records of native-born citizens after five years of completing their prison and legal system tenure assuming they have no new infractions - of course, this action may not apply for all crimes."

The Washington Bureau of the NAACP replied in a May 4 email that offered their March 31 press release. The opening statement in this press release reads, "Comprehensive Immigration Reform should not include criminalizing undocumented workers. Immigration policies must be consistent with humanitarian values."

Yet one only needs to read a February 27 article, "Closing the Gap between

Incarceration and Education of College-Aged African Americans" by Aretha Marbley writing in Teachers College Record, to wonder if the NAACP has lost its focus on the upward mobility of African Americans in the economic mainstream.

Marbley makes two points that should be pondered:

- "...In the college-age group, 18-24, the college/imprisoned ratio for black males is 2.6 to one compared to 28 to one for their white male counterparts, which means that for every 2.6 black males enrolled in college, there is one in prison, whereas for every 28 white males in college, there is only one in prison."

- "The cost to taxpayers for maintaining a prisoner is about \$60,000 per inmate per annum. On the other hand, having these young men working and earning an annual salary would generate a gross income subject to local taxes, through purchases made in their communities. For example, if these 800,000 black men currently incarcerated were employed at minimum wage then that income would translate into an economic influx of \$4.4 million per hour."

Perhaps it is too much to ask of our leadership to see the virtue in understanding that goodness begins at home.

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