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## A Lemon in the Senate

The immigration deal is a travesty of a mockery of a sham.

By George J. Borjas

**A**lthough the details of the immigration deal are sketchy, it seems to contain a number of key provisions:

1. Amnesty for 12 million illegal immigrants.
2. A guest-worker program that will admit 400,000 workers each year.
3. Vague promises of border enforcement sometime in the future.
4. A proposed change in the legal immigration system, away from the family preferences that now dominate the system and towards a point system that rewards skills.

Any “reform” that gives amnesty to 12 million illegal immigrants without taking care of the underlying illegal -immigration problem is a lemon. After all, what guarantees that the current batch of 12 million illegal immigrants will not be replaced by another 12 million in just a few years? What guarantees that guest workers will not stay illegally in the United States after their visa expires? What guarantees that border enforcement will be taken seriously by the Bush administration in the next two years or by the Democratic administration after that?

There is one dim light at the end of this dark tunnel, however. Much of the political elite in the Senate is now on record as supporting a point system that allocates entry visas on the basis of skills — a move that I have long advocated. We can argue over the details of the point system, but the political acceptance of such a system is a necessary condition in any eventual move towards a more rational immigration policy?

So what should we do? No bill is better than this bill. To paraphrase Woody Allen, this bill is a travesty of a mockery of a sham.” An amnesty is an amnesty, no matter how it is packaged and spun. The guest worker program will surely enrich employers, but will exacerbate the downward trajectory in the economic status of poorer workers. And I think it is much more likely that, after reading this article, Steve Jobs will FedEx me a pre-release version of the Iphone than the Bush administration will seriously enforce border security in the time they have left.

The bill neatly summarizes the intellectual flimsiness of the Bush administration — a flimsiness that has cost us dearly in so many other areas. Perhaps they can convince themselves otherwise; that legalizing the status of illegal immigrants is not an amnesty; that the laws of supply and demand can be repealed when it comes to immigration; that we will trust them to secure our borders in the next two years when they haven’t done so in the previous six. But we all know that, in the end, their promises are a sham, a travesty, and a mockery of what immigration policy should be about.

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