

Monday, January 12, 2004

## EDITORIAL

# Immigration proposals put Bush on the left track

President Bush deserves at least tentative praise this week for his recently proposed immigration policy — for a bold political coup that strengthens his political standing while probably improving the lives of people working within America's borders.

Bush outlined his new program Wednesday, wherein otherwise illegal immigrants could apply for temporary three-year visas (with the probable option of a three-year extension) and work in United States legally for that time. After their tenure, those workers could apply for permanent residency, although the system (rightfully) wouldn't grant any preference to those in the new temporary worker program. If they do not, or don't qualify for Green Cards, they would be required by law — presumably one better enforced than current illegal immigration and work laws — to return to their home country. Illegal immigrants who applied to the system would need to prove that they were working to remain in the country, a requirement that should discourage a flood of illegal immigration.

Some conservatives complained that the provisions reward lawbreakers.

"People who are here illegally — they need to be deported," Rep. Thomas Tancredo, R-Colo., argued. "People who hire them need to be fined. If they keep doing it, they need to be sent to jail. It's against the law."

Some liberals blasted the plan for not doing enough to resolve illegal immigration issues. Either way, that the plan is (predictably) coming under attack from both sides of the Congressional aisle paints Bush as a moderate on a sensitive issue in an election year, when wooing moderate and swing votes is, by definition, critical.

The move could attract usually left-leaning Hispanic voters, too, who comprise the largest and fastest-growing, and therefore increasingly politically essential, minority in the United States. In 2000, only 35 percent of Hispanics voted for Bush (compared to Vice President Al Gore's 65 percent).

Bush's goal, an administration official said, was to "promote compassion" and to fix the "broken" immigration-work system. And the system is very much broken: An estimated 8 million undocumented immigrants — most from Mexico — now live in America.

The White House program is similar to various proposals sitting in Congress.

A sage suggestion comes from Rep. Jim Kolbe, R-Ariz., who would allow (otherwise illegal) temporary workers to take jobs, given that they were first posted on the Internet for 14 days so that U.S. citizens could get the first chance to apply.

Such a provision is essential, too, to prevent an increase in citizen unemployment and to satisfy the program's stated goal of matching "willing workers with willing employers."

It's critical, too, that any immigration work program that legalizes the presence of currently illegal immigrants be combined with a more aggressive system of tracking down and deporting illegal immigrants who choose not to enter the system. Also, a determined assault — including harsher penalties — on businesses that continue to hire illegal immigrants is needed.

Otherwise, the system would devolve into a three-tier equivalent of the present, dysfunctional system: legal workers, newly legal immigrant workers under the program and illegal immigrant workers who have little more incentive to join the problem than they do now.



Eric Layton Illustration

## Quick to judge

Last week, the judge in the Scott Peterson case approved a change of venue motion filed by Peterson's defense. He agreed that Peterson couldn't receive a fair trial in Modesto, Calif., where 39 percent of the people polled believe Peterson is guilty and 61 percent are undecided.

Those statistics caught my attention. Before the first word of the first opening argument, 39 percent of those asked believed this man was a murderer. No "innocent until proven guilty" for Peterson.

I confess that I think Scott Peterson killed his wife. I haven't followed the case closely, haven't watched a single in-depth television program about the case and I haven't tried to keep up with all the updates. I formed my opinion from the snippets I've seen on CNN and other channels, in the newspapers, and on some of the Web sites I visit to keep up with the changes in the world around me.

So, if I think Peterson is guilty, what's my problem? Well, there's a tiny voice in the back of my head that keeps reminding me that the only facts I have to base my conclusion on come from the media. And, while I tend to argue on the side of journalistic integrity, let's face it: Reporters aren't asked to swear an oath to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth before they file a story, and no one asks them to weigh the prejudicial effect of what they are reporting against its probative value.

But what if he didn't do it?

Peterson's jurors are going to listen to the information that our laws deem admissible in court. Facts presented to the jury will be relevant, the witnesses will be under oath and will be subject to perjury charges for any untruths and some information, where relevance is outweighed by the ability to incite

emotions and prejudice, will be excluded from their consideration. If they decide, on the basis of the evidence presented to them, that Scott Peterson is not guilty beyond a reasonable doubt, I will trust their judgment. If, however, they conclude that he is guilty, I am going to wonder if it was because of what



Jessica Cole-Hodgkinson  
 Huh? What? Really.

they heard in court or because of what they heard in the media.

A bit of background for those of you who have recently returned from Tibetan monasteries and are unfamiliar with the case. In Modesto lived a young man named Scott Peterson and his beautiful, pregnant wife, Laci. On Christmas Eve, he went fishing and she disappeared. Months later, her body and the body of her unborn child were found washed ashore. Her husband has been accused of their murders. Those are the bare facts.

Of course, there are other facts we've been told. For example, when he was arrested, Peterson was wearing a Van Dyke goatee and had dyed his hair blond; Peterson's lawyer is the same guy who represented Winona Ryder in her shoplifting trial; and who wouldn't want to know that, while Laci was alive, Peterson had an affair with Amber Frey? Did I mention that nude pictures of Frey have ended up on the Internet?

Those probably aren't relevant facts, but they do influence the way I think about the case. That these facts come from the same news sources that I look to for information on politics, the economy and the war on terrorism creates a false impression of their importance. Worse, because this information comes from mainstream media, these facts are easily transformed from irrelevant to significant. The process goes something like this:

The news media report the blond hair and the goatee; the news media report things that are relevant; therefore, blond hair and a goatee must be relevant; conclusion: Peterson is attempting to disguise himself with blond hair and a goatee.

Or, the news media report that Peterson's lawyer represented Winona Ryder; the news media report things that are important; therefore, the former clients of Peterson's lawyer must be relevant; conclusion: Peterson's lawyer defends guilty clients.

Get the picture? Before long, instead of thinking about facts, I just shortcut to whatever conclusions I drew from the mere reporting of the information. So now, Peterson was wearing a disguise, his lawyer thinks he's guilty and his nude mistress was probably more sexually interesting to him than his eight-months-pregnant wife.

On the basis of this and information much like it, I've decided — though it is neither reasonable, rational nor remotely fair — that Scott Peterson killed his wife. For his sake, and for the sake of our system of justice, I hope his jurors have more sense.

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## ONLINE POLL

Each week, the Emerald publishes the results of the previous poll and the coming week's poll question.

Visit <http://www.dailyemerald.com> to vote.

Last question: Snow?

Results: Forty-nine votes.

• I love it and want more: 57.1 percent or 28 votes.

• That was fine and I've had enough: 26.5 percent or 13 votes.

• That was awful and I hate snow: 14.3 percent or seven votes.

• Don't care: 2.0 percent or one vote.

This week: Does the city of Eugene need a housing code?

Choices: Yes, it will be a benefit to students; Yes, it's the ethical thing to do; No, it will force landlords to raise rent; No, Eugene is fine without.