

Where the Candidates Stand on Immigration

A collage of four articles puts into some perspective the feelings of the candidates on the immigration issue at the moment. However, many people feel the presidential hopefuls would rather hide any discussion of immigration under a bushel basket, as it has become a flash point of angry voter backlash during this election year.

A self-styled newspaper of the produce industry, *The Packer*, at the website *The packer.com*, offers a piece by Larry Waterfield, who generalizes on the two: Obama and McCain, with the observations:

"Obama: He would tighten border controls and crack down on employers who hire illegal aliens. He wants to help Mexico develop economically to keep people from sneaking into the U.S., a number he puts at 500,000 to 800,000 a year. He makes no mention of developing a guest worker or temporary worker program.

"McCain: He also would tighten the border controls. But he has an elaborate plan to create a temporary worker program and expand existing programs, such as H-2A. He would allow foreign workers into the U.S. for all kinds of jobs, including agriculture. There would be incentives to make sure foreign workers returned home."¹

So, the two do give lip-service to cracking down on the border, but both have supported bills giving comprehensive immigration measures the 'thumbs-up.' McCain even sponsored one such bill. And, both men seem to be sporting rose-colored glasses these days. Obama does not have any plan for a guest worker program and McCain is relying on 'incentives' to see that foreign workers return home? Both comments remind one of the long-dead and good-riddance Bracero Program that offended just about everyone involved with it and was, in large part, responsible for the swell of illegal immigration today.

The *Altoona Mirror* (Pennsylvania) adds these asides to the list:

"How they stand

"A new president will take over in January, and the candidates have similar goals in mind as they address the issue.

"John McCain's top priority is to secure the nation's borders using physical and virtual barriers, providing funding for ground and training resources and deploying various vehicles where needed and appropriate along the southern border. He wants to create a verification system for employers and prosecute those hiring illegal immigrants.

"He also wants to implement guest worker programs to address U.S. labor needs while still protecting American jobs.

"One of the programs McCain plans to reform is the H-2A visa program for temporary farm workers...

... "While Barack Obama's campaign plan doesn't directly address the program, he also wants to create secure borders using additional personnel, infrastructure and technology at the southern border and at U.S. ports. He, like McCain, wants to find a

balance between addressing U.S. labor needs and protecting jobs, and he wants to lower fees immigrants must pay to become U.S. citizens.

"Also like McCain, Obama wants to create an employment verification system. He also believes legal immigrants who fight in the U.S. military should receive citizenship more quickly."²

A recent McCain campaign ad directed at Spanish-speaking peoples in this country set off a firestorm in the Obama camp, shedding considerable light on the sensitive nature of the conversation on immigration. And while both sides engaged in name-calling, neither one came out with a new or definitive position on the matter. The dust-up was reported in the *Washington Post* as follows:

"The McCain campaign has started airing a new Spanish-language television commercial in the battleground states of Colorado, Nevada and New Mexico that lays the failure of comprehensive immigration reform at the feet of Barack Obama and his Democratic colleagues -- despite the fact that Obama supported the bipartisan John McCain-Edward Kennedy efforts to enact such reforms and voted for their final proposal last year.

..."Obama and his Congressional allies say they are on the side of immigrants," the ad's announcer says in Spanish in the spot, released Friday. "But are they? The press reports that their efforts were 'poison pills' that made immigration reform fail. The result: No guest worker program. No path to citizenship. No secure borders. No reform. Is that being on our side? Obama and his Congressional allies: Ready to block immigration reform, but not ready to lead."

... "Today, Obama says he backs an approach that "protects our security, bolsters our economy, and preserves America's tradition as a nation of immigrants who are welcomed as long as they work hard and play by the rules" -- and he recently told a Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute gathering, "I think it's time for a president who won't walk away from comprehensive immigration reform when it becomes politically unpopular."

... "These days neither candidate has much to say about "immigration," perhaps because it's an issue of little importance to voters nationwide. Last week's Washington Post-ABC News poll ranked immigration as the ninth-most important issue among registered voters, with only 1 percent calling it their main concern."³

Then there is this, from the *El Paso Times* (an admittedly one-sided pro-immigrant publication.) However, they do make a few valid observations on the campaign trail avoidance of the immigration issue:

"As the presidential race heads toward Nov. 4, both candidates continue to avoid talking about immigration and immigration reform -- a politically charged national issue that has real-life implications in El Paso and other border cities.

..."It is an issue they are both trying to avoid," said Eli M. Kantor, a California immigration lawyer. "Both candidates are pretty much pro-immigration reform, but it is not a popular issue to talk about right now."

..."It is easier right now to just talk about securing the borders," Kantor said. "The candidates have to appeal to all the voters, so they don't want to alienate anyone on either side of the issue."

..."The system has been broken for a while now, and only a political Band-Aid has been put on it," said Charles Boehmer, a University of Texas at El Paso political science professor. "The new president will have to tackle the issue. No one is happy with the status quo."⁴

¹ Larry Waterfield, "*What does agriculture gain under Obama, McCain?*," 9-2-08. Website at: <http://thepacker.com/icms/dtaa2/content/wrapper.asp?alink=2008-133731-978.asp&styp=opinion&fb=> (accessed 9-15-08)

² Jessica VanderKolk, "*Illegals pit safety vs. economics*," 9-14-08. Website at: <http://www.altoonamirror.com/page/content.detail/id/511037.html?nav=742>. (accessed 9-15-08)

³ Ed O'Keefe, "*McCain Revives Immigration Debate -- in Spanish Only*," 9-15-08. Website at: http://voices.washingtonpost.com/the-trail/2008/09/15/mccain_revives_immigration_deb.html. (accessed 9-15-08)

⁴ Ramon Bracamontes, "*Immigration still avoided by candidates*," 9-14-08. Website at: http://www.elpasotimes.com/news/cj_10460497. (accessed 9-15-08)