

# *The Washington Times*

## Letters to the Editor

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### **Market forces dictate the best immigration policy**

Contrary to statements in the Thursday editorial "The immigration debate," the history of the Bracero Program shows how a modest use of market forces, combined with enforcement, offers the best -- perhaps only -- solution to illegal immigration.

Beginning in 1942, the Bracero Program allowed Mexican farm workers to be employed as seasonal contract labor. Despite these legal admissions, limited enforcement and other factors provided little deterrent to illegal entry until 1954.

That is when a controversial crackdown on illegal immigration ensued. Importantly, Immigration and Naturalization Service Commissioner Joseph Swing preceded the crackdown by working with growers to replace an illegal, and therefore unpredictable, source of labor with a legal, regulated labor supply. The workers, being rational, preferred entering legally, and Mr. Swing received praise for pushing the substitution of legal for illegal workers.

Bracero admissions rose from approximately 201,000 in 1953 to more than 430,000 a year between 1956 and 1959. The increased Bracero admissions produced dramatic results. Illegal entry, as measured by INS apprehensions at the border, fell by an astonishing 95 percent between 1953 and 1959. (Apprehensions fell to 45,336 in 1959, compared to more than 1 million in both 1954 and 2005).

However, complaints from unions led to the end of the program by 1964. What happened to illegal immigration after we stopped letting Mexican farm-workers enter legally? It skyrocketed. From 1964 to 1976, while the number of Border Patrol agents remained essentially constant, INS apprehensions of those entering illegally increased more than 1,000 percent.

Though economic conditions in Mexico and the lack of temporary visas for non-agricultural jobs also contributed, an internal INS report found that apprehensions of male Mexican agricultural workers increased by 600 percent between 1965 and 1970.

This did not surprise INS officials. At a House Committee on Agriculture hearing in the 1950s, a top INS official was asked what would happen to illegal immigration if the Bracero Program ended. He replied, "We can't do the impossible, Mr. Congressman."

Conservatives should not abandon belief in markets simply because the issue is immigration. Those who say we should not permit more people to work on legal temporary visas until we "control the border" have it backward: The only proven way to control the border is to open up paths to legal entry, allowing the market to succeed where law enforcement alone has failed.

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