The Ripoff of American Workers and Taxpayers

by Phyllis Schlafly Apr. 26, 2006

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The illegal aliens in this country are threatening a massive boycott on May 1, purportedly to demonstrate they are so essential that the U.S. economy would shut down without their labor. On the contrary, such a boycott will expose the lie expressed by President Bush in Cancun, Mexico that they are "doing work that Americans will not do."

According to the Pew Hispanic Center, illegal aliens are less than 5 percent of our labor force. If every one of the 20 million illegal aliens in our country plays hooky from his job on May 1, the overwhelming majority of those same types of jobs will be worked by millions of American citizens.

All over the country, American citizens will flip hamburgers in fast-food shops, wash dishes in restaurants, change sheets in hotels, mow lawns, trim shrubs, pick produce, drive taxis, replace roofs on houses, and do all kinds of construction work. Americans are quite willing to work unpleasant, menial, tiresome, and risky jobs, but not for Third World wages.

An employment service in Mobile, Alabama recently received an "urgent request" to fill 270 job openings from contractors who were hired to rebuild and clear areas of Alabama devastated by Hurricane Katrina. The agency immediately sent 70 laborers and construction workers to three job sites.

After two weeks on the job, the men were fired by employers who told them "the Mexicans had arrived" and were willing to work for lower wages. The Americans had been promised $10 an hour, but the employers preferred Mexicans who would work for less.

Employment agency manager Linda Swope told The Washington Times, "When they told the guys they would not be needed, they actually cried ... and we cried with them. This is a shame."

Ms. Swope said that employment agencies throughout Alabama, Louisiana and Mississippi all face similar problems because an estimated 30,000 men from Mexico and Central and South America, many in crowded buses and trucks, came into those three states after Hurricane Katrina, willing to work for less than whatever was paid to American citizens.

Meanwhile, President Bush signed the Katrina Emergency Assistance Act extending for 13 weeks the unemployment benefits to Americans displaced by Katrina. Thus employers get the benefit of cheap foreign labor while you and I provide taxpayer handouts to the guys whom the government allowed to be displaced from jobs they were eager to take.

There is no penalty on employers who replace Americans with illegal aliens at lower pay. Homeland Security even announced it has suspended the sanctioning of employers who hire illegal aliens, and President Bush suspended the Davis-Bacon Act, which requires local contractors to pay "prevailing" wages.

A study published by the National Bureau of Economic Research reported that the surge of immigration in the 1980s and 1990s lowered the wages of our own high school dropouts by 8.2 percent. The surge has accelerated since that report was issued.

The Congressional Budget Office reported that 60 percent of Mexican and Central American workers in the United States in 2004 lacked a high school diploma. The Kennedy-McCain-Bush guest worker plan would import more uneducated, unskilled workers, and thereby deny our own high school dropouts (of whom we have too many) the opportunity to get started in building their lives in the labor force.

We are threatened that the cost of lettuce will rise precipitously if we don't continue to import Mexican agricultural workers. But a farm worker gets only 6 or 7 cents out of a $1 head of lettuce, so even if the pay doubles consumers would hardly notice the difference.

On the other hand, the costs the taxpayers are forced to pay for social benefits for low-paid workers are astronomical. The National Research Council reports that an immigrant to the United States without a high-school diploma consumes $89,000 more in government services than he pays in taxes during his lifetime.

Low-paid illegal aliens obviously pay very little taxes, but they cash in on all sorts of benefits paid by other taxpayers, such as schooling for their children, emergency health care, housing subsidies, Earned Income Tax Credit, and law enforcement. If the 20 million illegals are legalized, they will also become eligible for Medicaid, and that's a real break-the-bank prospect.

These figures don't even count the rapidly growing underground economy, in which millions of illegal aliens are paid in off-the-books cash. That enables both employer and employee to avoid paying taxes, and enables employers to avoid paying workers' compensation, unemployment compensation, and assorted other taxes.

If the Internal Revenue Service collected all the taxes that should be paid by the underground economy, our current budget deficit would disappear overnight,

according to the Bear Stearns study released last year. The Americans who pay taxes are giving a free ride to those who are not paying taxes, and a 7-cent increase in the price of lettuce should not be on our worry list.