

Time to deliver

by The San Diego Union-Tribune

The Bush administration has been clear about what it wants from Congress in terms of comprehensive immigration reform, and it was just as clear Wednesday when it dispatched Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff and Commerce Secretary Carlos Gutierrez to Capitol Hill to argue for what the White House thinks is the way to fix a broken system.

It is ironic that President Bush, who encountered such resistance from fellow Republicans last year, may now find Democrats to be more simpatico on the issue.

There's a catch. Illinois Rep. Rahm Emanuel, chairman of the House Democratic Caucus, has said he expects the Bush administration to persuade at least 85 Republicans to vote for earned legalization for illegal immigrants. This would advance the idea that the legislation is bipartisan and insulate Democrats from criticism.

In their testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee, Chertoff and Gutierrez tried to address concerns that what the administration was proposing amounted to amnesty for illegal immigrants. An amnesty is unconditional, they said, and what the administration has in mind is loaded with conditions. Before they could stay in the United States legally, illegal immigrants would have to learn English, pay fines and back taxes, undergo background checks, and go to the back of the line behind those who came legally.

Chertoff made the case that a guest worker plan is good for national security because it would bring people out of the shadows and into the daylight. Gutierrez insisted that immigrant workers are an essential part of our country's economic growth and that they do jobs Americans aren't doing.

Both men are right. And Congress should listen. The time for playing games with this issue is over. Now it's time to find a fair and logical solution that serves both our economic needs and our security concerns.

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