

Amnesty by another name

by Cal_Thomas

I wish I could believe the president and those senators who claim their agreement on immigration legislation will "fix" the problems of open borders and illegal aliens. I can't, because the public has had no input into the measure; the last time Congress "fixed" the problem, it got worse; and it appears Democrats and Republicans care more about harvesting votes for their respective parties than doing what's best for their fellow citizens. The bill would allow for the hiring of 18,000 additional border patrol agents, construction of 370 miles of fence and 200 miles of vehicle barriers, ground-based radar, camera towers and aerial vehicles. Employers would have to electronically verify new hires within 18 months and all existing employees within three years. The priority of border security first, legalization second sounds good. Only after the border is secured, say the senators and White House, will the guest-worker program kick in. Again, I wish I could believe this, but when it comes to immigration, I don't trust either party. It's a safe bet that once the U.S. government legalizes the illegals, many will not abide by the conditions. What then? The president can say the Senate measure isn't amnesty, but that doesn't make it something else. The fact is that many of those who broke our laws to get here will be allowed to stay. A new immigrant category called the "Z Visa" will be introduced. Z-1 covers illegal aliens who got here and started work before Jan. 1, 2007. Z-2 is for parents and spouses of illegals who qualify under the Z-1 category. Z-3 is for the children of illegal aliens qualifying under the Z-1 category. As the Heritage Foundation's Brian Darling has written, "Z Visa" holders can remain in their "Z" status indefinitely, meaning they never have to pursue a "pathway to citizenship." They'd also be allowed to get Social Security numbers and benefits from some welfare programs. And, writes Darling, "there is no cap on the number of amnesty recipients in the draft language." Z Visa holders can't vote, but who doubts that a liberal judge will rule such a ban unconstitutional? Only in America can one violate the law and then appeal to the law and the Constitution for undeserved rights. The draft language requires illegals to return "home" for a year or two before applying for citizenship, but who will enforce that provision? No president is going to suffer the political fallout from a mass deportation of lawbreakers, especially after they've been on Oprah with their babies, crying their eyes out. Neither am I betting that imposed fines will be paid. That this bill is hundreds of pages long and was mostly crafted in secret without hearings and without input from the public should also make us wary. So should Sen. Edward Kennedy's enthusiasm for it. Each time Kennedy embraces a Republican, the Republican usually gets his pocket picked. Worse, Republicans don't seem to mind. Radio talk show host Rush Limbaugh predicted last week that if the Senate draft legislation becomes law "there is an 80 percent chance that Hillary Clinton will be the next president of the United States . we are doomed in '08." He predicted this would be "the last straw as far as the Republican base is concerned in being able to trust Republicans that it elects to represent them." Why do our elected leaders care more for noncitizens than they do citizens? There is no constitutional right to come to America; neither is there a right to become a U.S. citizen. Do we let robbers keep the money if they successfully break into a bank? Isn't this the message we have been sending to illegals: if you can get here, you can have all sorts of goodies previously reserved for people who abide by the law? Former Attorney General Edwin Meese thinks the only way to solve the illegal immigration problem is for lawmakers to "uphold the principle that the rule of law requires the fair, firm and equitable enforcement of the law." He would avoid granting amnesty to those who've lived and worked in the United States illegally and ensure that any temporary-worker program is short term. Meese knows something about the subject. He admits 1986 legislation that attempted to stem the tide of illegal immigration by combining amnesty with increased workplace enforcement of immigration law failed. The stakes are enormous, for the country and for the future of the Republican Party. It's not worth passing this measure just so both sides can claim "victory," if the victory is a Pyrrhic one. (c) 2007 Tribune Media Services, Inc.