

# Proposed Bracero II program can attract needed workers

Used during WWII to solve labor shortage, it could work again

By Phillip Aronoff



Bracero Jose Navarro of Mexicali, Mexico, picks berries in Salinas, Calif. Reviving the Bracero program could help workers wanting to stay in the U.S. while providing needed help for U.S. employers. Associated Press



NANA photo

Braceros at a Texas border crossing. Under the Bracero proposal workers would be eligible to apply for permanent residency and eventual citizenship.

Help wanted signs are everywhere. Less regulation and lower taxes allow the economic creativity of the American entrepreneur to thrive and grow the economy. To honest observers, conservatives have won the argument. That debate should now be over. So how do we supply the workers required for this new economic reality?

It is time for the United States to resuscitate the Bracero program. During World War II, we solved our tremendous labor shortage by bringing in workers from outside of our borders to supplement the American workforce. Through a series of laws and diplomatic agreements, we granted them work visas, and they came and enabled our factories to produce war material and the crops needed to feed the country and our soldiers.

Thankfully, we are not fighting a world war. We have created another economic miracle. To prevent it from slowing down due to a shortage of workers, we must do two things: 1) Train our youth for the skills required, making top-notch vocational education available, and 2) Bring in foreign workers who cannot find better than marginal employment in their home countries and who want to work to improve the lives of their families. Here are the points that, when implemented, would create a win-win solution.

Congress should create a new worker's visa, which would be given to applicants at the U.S. consulates and border crossings. Offices throughout the country would issue visas to people already here, making them eligible for the legal immigration status.

Under this plan, recipients of the visas would have a limited time to secure employment or leave the country, reapplying if they choose. Applicants must present proof they have no criminal past. Employers must have a federal taxpayer identification number. Visa recipients would receive special social security numbers. They would pay all taxes, which would be deducted from their paychecks. They would not be

eligible for any tax refunds. Certainly, they would not be eligible for any social services such as food assistance or housing assistance. Even though they are paying into Medicare and Social Security they would not be eligible to collect benefits under this visa.

The applicants would have to purchase health insurance when they receive the visas. If they drive, they would need a driver's license. The visas would be valid for one year and would be renewed only if the recipients have not had any legal problems and continue to be gainfully employed, proof of which they would have to tender every year.

There would be no limit on the number of visas allocated. Instead, there would be a formula for situations in which a specified number of visa holders have not yet found jobs, triggering a moratorium on new visas until the number has been achieved.

This program would eliminate the need to sneak in across the desert or the Rio Grande, or to be smuggled in the back of a truck, risking their lives and the lives of American border agents. If visas are not being issued, workers would know jobs are not available so they will not try to sneak in. If visas are being granted then they would apply and receive permission to enter this country legally, offering an opportunity for a new life in America. This will save lives and free up our resources at the border to go after the drug smugglers and human traffickers.

It also means applicants would not need to bring their families here because they can return home as often as they like. This was the experience with the original Bracero program. Foreign workers' children would not be filling the schools here. Instead, those workers would pay for their children's educations in their home countries with the money they send back.

While looking for work they would not be counted in the unemployment statistics.

It is important to remember that the people working here also are consumers. If we don't increase our consumption, the economy will again stagnate. We must look at these immigrants as consumers as well as producers.

These workers would be eligible to apply for permanent residency and eventual citizenship based upon the normal requirements, with the proviso that appropriate visa numbers would be made available. If they're granted citizenship, they would be able to bring along only their spouses and children. We want to give them a vested interest in the success of the program and in the success of the United States. They want this, too.

I am well aware that many people feel that Congress, and our country, are too divided to reach any agreement to fix our broken immigration system. But I still believe that there are ways to bridge these seemingly irreconcilable differences, and I am determined to try.

Aronoff is the GOP candidate for Texas' Congressional District 29.