

Time to Fix Immigration

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In Connecticut, one mayor is thinking about identification cards to help illegal immigrants, while another mayor is trying to arrest day workers on street corners. In Burbank, Calif., local officials have required Home Depot to build a shelter for the large numbers of immigrant laborers waiting outside the store for work.

In bits and pieces, communities all over the country are trying desperately to deal with what is really an immense national problem. Only Washington can untangle an immigration mess that draws a growing number of illegal immigrants across the nation's borders every year. Labeled criminals or even "invaders" by a few in President Bush's own party, many of these immigrants are actually risking their lives to take on the jobs that many Americans have chosen to avoid. One contractor recently told *The Los Angeles Times* that if officials began cracking down on illegal immigrants, "who will rebuild New Orleans?"

Only a comprehensive plan, a bipartisan one with many of the ideas outlined earlier by President Bush, can address this national issue. Yes, such a plan needs to secure the borders, but it must also establish a guest worker program that serves industry, American workers and immigrants. And it needs to deal humanely and fairly with the 11 million immigrants who are already here illegally.

So far, a bill by Senators John McCain, the Arizona Republican, and Edward Kennedy, the Massachusetts Democrat, has the most workable solution. Their bill tries to lure people out of the shadows by offering a lengthy route to legal status. Immigrants working here illegally would pay a fine of at least \$2,000, and go to the end of the long line of those trying to get legitimate working papers. Sending them home first to apply for permission to immigrate simply won't work.

Washington is still circling these ideas too slowly, forcing too many people and politicians to take matters into their own hands. It's time for Congress and the president to do their job. The local communities, in coming up with haphazard or dangerous solutions, like vigilantes in New Mexico and makeshift arrests for overcrowded housing on Long Island, are really crying out for a national cure.