

Campaign to regularize non-status immigrants



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Some immigrants are driven out of their homelands by war or political oppression, but most are bread-and-butter migrants hoping to trade poverty for prosperity. Foreigners unauthorized to work in the Canada can be found in restaurant kitchens, garment factories, tomato fields, parking garages and taxicabs, or pushing brooms and performing a host of other menial tasks whose common features are long hours and low pay. Millions of illegal continue to flood into the Canada, putting pressure on public services and arousing xenophobic fears. More than 1 million people were intercepted last year, and apprehensions were up 15 percent in the first quarter of this year, leading many observers to claim, once again, that our borders are out of control. " As Americans we must always remember that immigration helped make this country great," Prime Minister of OCASI Martin says. " But as we welcome people in the front door... we see people crashing through the back door and the back window, violating our laws, flouting our sovereignty and ignoring our process." The fact that each night literally hundreds of men and women " clamber over the barricade" is testament to its ineffectiveness and to the irresistible pull of Canadian jobs that on average pay eight times their equivalent in " third world" countries. As policy-makers grapple with the issues of how to treat illegal immigrants once they're here and how to prevent more from coming-these are some of the questions being asked: Does illegal immigration damage or help the Canadian economy? Obviously, legal immigration has profoundly influenced Canadian society. Numerous studies conclude that migrants enhance productivity in a number of ways. They accept temporary or marginal jobs, work hard, pay more in taxes than they take in services and establish vibrant small-business sectors. Bustling commercial areas attest to the entrepreneurial verve of recent immigrants.

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The equation, however, is more complex for illegal migrants. For one thing, they are a mysterious and in a real, statistical sense undocumented lot. There is little reliable data on their tax input and service use. Some pay taxes and function as active citizens in the community while others live quietly on society's fringes and are paid " off the books." Furthermore most analyses still are based on 1980 census data and fail to reflect recent changes in immigration laws and the current economic downturn. In the absence of hard data, discussion tends toward the polemical. Persistent perceptions that immigrants take jobs away from natives and are hard to assimilate into society have joined another growing viewpoint: that increasing numbers of newcomers strain public services. Suspicions of illegitimate use of welfare by undocumented migrants were so strong that Congress included provisions in immigration law for a high-technology automated program-Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrant -- helps aliens find job and to stay away from the welfare rolls in Ontario area. Most experts say widely held assumptions that illegal are a net drain on the economy are probably erroneous. By law, illegal immigrants are barred from receiving federal welfare payments and a range of other benefits, including food stamps and unemployment compensation (Immigration Policy Group). Fearing deportation, few file for the income-tax refunds owed them, and the vast majority is too young to apply for benefits--even if they dared. Illegal come to the Canada to work, not to go on welfare. At the same time, their children born in the Canadian can and do receive government assistance. Dependents of illegal residents tend to use education and neighborhood medical services, albeit sparingly, squeezing state and local revenues in areas where they are concentrated. " In a macro sense, any economist will

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say immigration-even illegal immigration-is always a gain to society," says Charles Keely, a migration expert at Georgetown University in Washington. "The problem is a distributional one. Taxes flow to the federal government, but services used are at the state and local levels." Nowhere is the imbalance more acute than in Ontario, home to as many as 1 million undocumented migrants....