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Perspectives on the Bush Administration's New Immigrant Guestworker Proposal

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Perspectives on the Bush Administration's New Immigrant Guestworker Proposal

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Panel Discussion:
**Perspectives on the Bush Administration's New
Immigrant Guestworker Proposal**

MARCH 30, 2004

On January 7 2004 President Bush announced his plan to give legal status to millions of illegal immigrants in the United States.¹ This plan is quite ambitious. The plan allows for the estimated 8-14 million illegal immigrant workers within the United States to apply for a legal temporary worker status within the United States for a given amount of time.² The temporary worker status would purportedly afford these currently undocumented workers the same employee benefits given to those who are legally employed within the United States.³ In February, the Department of Homeland Security attempted to give more form to the proposal. Testifying before the Senate Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on Immigration, officials stated that workers and their families, after undergoing security clearances, would be given temporary worker permits for a period of three years⁴ workers would be allowed to renew their permits indefinitely and be allowed to apply for permanent legal residency⁵ and finally, temporary workers would be allowed to travel in and out of the country.⁶

The plan has stirred considerable debate since its announcement.⁷ In conjunction with the University of Denver College of Law's Diversity Week 2004 entitled "Other Views: Education v. Confrontation,"⁸ the *Denver Journal of*

1. See Elizabeth Bumiller, *Bush Would Give Illegal Workers Broad New Rights*, N.Y. TIMES, Jan. 7, 2004, at A1.

2. See *id.*

3. *Id.*

4. See Rachel L. Swarns, *Officials Discuss Details of Bush's Immigrant Worker Plan*, N.Y. TIMES, Feb. 13, 2004, at A28.

5. See *id.*

6. *Id.*

7. See Richard W. Stevenson & Steven Greenhouse, *Plan for Illegal Immigrant Workers Draws Fire From Two Sides*, N.Y. TIMES, Jan. 8, 2004, at A28. See also Rachel L. Swarns, *The 2004 Campaign: House and Senate Races, Outcry on Right Over Bush Plan on Immigration*, N.Y. TIMES, Feb. 21, 2004, at A1. Cf. Jeff Madrick, *The Bush Proposal on Illegal Immigrants Is Tentative but, Important First Step*, N.Y. TIMES, Jan. 22, 2004 at C2.

8. The DU Law Diversity Advocates held its annual Diversity Week from March 29 to April 2, 2004. The week-long event was entitled "Other Views: Education versus Confrontation," and included speakers, film showings, discussion sessions, panels and debates.

Diversity Week was established in 2001 to make students aware of issues of diversity, oppression and injustice as they relate to the law and legal profession. DU law students, faculty, law student

International Law and Policy sponsored a panel discussion on the Bush administration's new immigrant guestworker proposal.

The panel consisted of the following members: Pat Medige, Managing Attorney of the Migrant Farm Worker Division of Colorado Legal Services, President of the Board of Directors for the Rocky Mountain Immigrant Advocacy Network, and a member of the Board of Directors, El Centro Humanitario Para Los Trabajadores (Humanitarian Center for Workers); Regina Germain, Visiting Professor, Immigration Clinic, University of Denver College of Law and Mariana Diaz, Consul for Political and Economic Affairs, Consulate General of Mexico in Denver. Starting on the next page, the following comments and outlines are elaborations on the discussion that occurred that day.

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organizations, community members and legal professionals were invited to participate in and attend the event.

Each spring, the Diversity Advocates organization seeks to assess the issues and concerns plaguing the legal community and address those needs through appropriate training and education during Diversity Awareness Week. Highlights and topics of this year's event included diversity from Christian perspective, medical discrimination and assisted suicide, same-sex marriages and *Roe v. Wade*.

To learn more about Diversity Week or the Diversity Advocates organization, visit www.law.du.edu/diveristyweek.

I would like to thank David Gair for coming up with the original idea and arranging for the presence of our panel's members, as well as Heather Beattie for her logistical support provided for this event.