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**Section:**

OPINION

President George W. Bush in January announced his principles for a temporary worker program and regularization of the status of some of the nation's 7 million to 11 million undocumented immigrants. Democrats responded with legislation by Sen. Edward Kennedy of Massachusetts and Rep. Luis Gutierrez of Chicago. And the partisan race is on for the increasingly important Latino vote in November.

The issue is of deep interest to Illinois' business community, which should make itself heard.

* **Undocumented immigrants play an important economic role:**There are some 500,000 undocumented immigrants in Illinois. They fill critical low-wage labor needs. Our agricultural, manufacturing, restaurant, tourism, health care and service industries would grind to a halt without them. We can continue to turn a hypocritical blind eye to the obvious, or address real world problems pragmatically.
* **Immigration policies that respect the market demand for labor will restore the rule of law in the U.S.:**Inflexible immigration policies result in massive flows of illegal labor, with both workers and employers complicit in the hypocrisy. The Illinois economy is global. Over 94% of the net labor-force growth in the Chicago area during the 1990s was attributable to immigrant workers.

Reform will facilitate the movement of skilled workers and business professionals to meet market needs, create a legal flow of temporary workers with strong labor protections and allow the vast underground of hard-working undocumented workers to come out of the shadows.

* **Legalization will unleash the economic potential of Illinois' immigrant communities:**Chicago's banking community was shocked by the influx of $100 million in immigrant savings in the few short years since banks began accepting the "matricula consular" (consular ID) issued by the Mexican government to its foreign nationals in the U.S. Several weeks ago, Crain's wrote about the thriving market in home mortgages for the undocumented, despite the lack of a secondary market. The entrepreneurial engine of the Mexican-American community in Chicago, the 26th Street business district, pays the second-highest amount of sales tax after the Magnificent Mile along North Michigan Avenue.
* **Security:**There is a tiny group of people who would enter this country to hurt us. The existence of large, increasingly sophisticated networks of smugglers of human beings and purveyors of false IDs, serving millions of undocumented who want only to work, is bad for national security. Legalization will reduce the demand for human smuggling and false IDs.
* **The moral imperative:**I come from a tradition of Catholic business people who take their faith seriously. Many in the business community would agree that it is a moral outrage that we have ended up with a large underground of vulnerable workers and children, where a family of four earns on average $10,000 less a year than legal workers. It may be very convenient to have these people cleaning our homes, caring for our children and cutting our grass on the cheap, with no prospect of bettering their lives. But a sense of right and wrong, as much as economic and security imperatives, is a fine reason for the business community to speak out on this issue.

PHOTO (COLOR)

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By Joshua Hoyt

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