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EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
BUREAU OF THE BUDGET
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MEMORANDUM FOR MR. BERNARD M. SHANLEY

Subject: Foreign Labor Program

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Recent developments indicate the desirability of obtaining, as early as practicable, the Administration's position on the future of the foreign labor program. Current authority to import Mexican nationals for agricultural labor in the United States expires in December 1953. The attached syndicated column, which appeared in May 1951, indicates the President's interest in this question.

History

During the last war many foreign nationals were employed in the United States, largely in unskilled occupations. For many years prior to this time, Mexican nationals were used extensively on farms along our southern border, particularly in the Lower Rio Grande Valley.

Since the war the use of Mexican citizens and our own citizens from Puerto Rico has been extensive in the agricultural sector of the economy. In 1951, under the terms of Public Law 78 of the 82d Congress, the importation of Mexican nationals for agricultural and related labor was regularized. This statute provided for the negotiation of agreements with Mexico by which its citizens would be admitted under specifically agreed terms and conditions to work in American agriculture. These terms and conditions are guaranteed by the United States Government and the Department of Labor has been staffed to see that the terms are carried out. Under this legislation about 200,000 workers have been imported each year and returned to Mexico after completion of their work. Legislation authorizing the negotiation of such agreements expires December 31, 1953.

Wet-back Problem

In addition to legal contract workers from Mexico, there has been extensive illegal immigration into this country from Mexico. It has been estimated that over 2 million aliens enter the United States illegally from Mexico each year seeking employment. Many of these persons do not return to their country of origin and move relatively freely throughout the United States. Being fugitives from justice, they live and work under intolerable conditions. Labor and working standards for these people are generally very low and the most elemental human and civil rights are denied them in most places. Such a large influx of illegal aliens presents a grave potential

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security problem and reduces other elements of the government's alien security policy to a ridiculous state. The presence of large numbers of these people in local communities tends to depress working standards and makes it virtually impossible for local governments to furnish any normal community service to them.

Budget Implications

Under Public Law 78 the Department of Labor has been charged with contracting for and importing legal workers. It is estimated that the cost of this program for each of the fiscal years 1953 and 1954 will be about \$2.5 million. Although increased appropriations have been requested for the Immigration and Naturalization Service to enable it to control the wet-back traffic; these increases have not been granted by the Congress. It is admitted that past efforts to stop the "wet-back" invasion have been unsuccessful and that even with extremely large expenditures of manpower and money it would be very difficult to close the border.

Current Status

This question of the Administration's position on the Mexican labor program requires early attention in view of the fact that Committees of both the House and the Senate will begin hearings on an extension of Public Law 78 the week of March 23. The Labor Department is scheduled to testify before the Senate Agriculture Committee on Monday, March 23, and before the House Agriculture Committee on March 24. We are informally advised that the Department will propose a one year extension of authority pending a review of the program.

The Issues

The issues involved in the importation and use of Mexican workers are not clear-cut and involve the substantive responsibility of several Executive Branch agencies. The problem is directly related to farm policy, foreign relations, agricultural manpower needs and labor standards. In terms of immediate Administration policy, the following questions appear to be fundamental.

1. Is the anticipated deficit in agricultural manpower such as to warrant an importation program? A greater supply and utilization of our domestic labor force could be expected if wages and working conditions for this type of work were more attractive. However, short of large scale programs to increase agricultural mechanization, induce greater utilization of underemployed citizens, and improve working and living standards, it is the opinion of the Departments of Labor and Agriculture that there will be a shortage of farm workers in certain areas.

2. How long should the authority to negotiate labor agreements with Mexico be extended? There does not seem to be any reasonable ground upon which to base any but a short-term extension unless one wishes to assume that the use of this type of worker should become institutionalized in American agriculture or that it is not possible to integrate under-employed citizens into useful agricultural pursuits.
3. Should a legal importation program be considered only as part of a package which includes intensified efforts to limit the wet-back traffic? An effective border program is expensive and difficult to implement. However, unless the flow and use of illegal aliens is significantly reduced, we face a dilemma. On the one hand the program for importing legal contract workers tends to be miscarried. Responsible testimony indicates that in many places the illegal worker is preferred to the contract worker. Moreover, a constant flow of illegal aliens poses a distinct security threat as well as a threat to labor and community standards in areas far removed from the border. On the other hand even if the anti-wet-back program is not intensified, abandonment of the legal importation program would amount to the Government's tacit endorsement of the use of illegal alien labor.
4. What Federal responsibility is to be assumed in the longer run for minimizing reliance on foreign workers? This question is far reaching and must be answered within the limits of budget policy as well as national social, agricultural, and manpower policy. A satisfactory solution also involves our economic policies toward Mexico, for the "push" forces from below the border cannot be underestimated when considering the total problem. These wider policy issues have not been discussed in this memorandum but they provide an essential backdrop for the Mexican labor problem.

Satisfactory resolution of the issues involved in problem set forth in this memorandum requires a coordinated approach. The record of the past is not good in this regard and has been attributed to the fact that no agency has sufficient program interest to assume over-all responsibility. The question of Executive coordination on this problem is secondary only to the substantive issues involved.



Assistant Director for
Legislative Reference

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(From a syndicated column appearing in May, 1951, reprinted
in the Congressional Record June 19, 1951)

GENERAL EISENHOWER AGAINST WETBACKS (By Robert S. Allen) *

Like President Truman, General Dwight Eisenhower also writes personal letters — but of a very different kind.

Illustrative of that is a letter the European commander wrote to Senator Fulbright, Democrat of Arkansas, chairman of the RFC investigation, warmly commending a speech he made on the urgent need for more morality in American affairs.

Eisenhower's letter is particularly significant because of the sharp condemnation he voices of the extensive practice of illegally importing farm workers from Mexico.

Fulbright had made no mention of this subject in his speech. As far as is known, Eisenhower had never expressed himself on the matter. Also, there is no clue in his letter why he raised the issue. But he very pointedly cites the importation of wetbacks as a glaring example of degraded morals.

Following is Eisenhower's remarkable letter:

"It would be difficult for me to express the fullness of my agreement with your sentiments in the speech reported in the New York Times on Wednesday. Incidentally, I wonder whether you noticed that, on the same page in the New York Times, there was a story from which I quote the first paragraph as follows:

" 'The rise in illegal border crossings by Mexican wetbacks to a current rate of more than 1,000,000 cases a year has been accompanied by a curious relaxation in ethical standards extending all the way from the farmer-exploiters of this contraband labor to the highest levels of the Federal Government.'

"The article continued, 'Although wetbacks are fugitives from justice, Southwestern cotton, citrus, and vegetable growers have come to the fixed view that there is nothing wrong in employing them, harboring them, or even in actively recruiting them across the international boundary. Further, they have come to feel they have a vested right in the traffic.'

"There are so many specific points in your talk to which I am moved to say amen, that the only thing I can say is that, as a citizen, I am truly grateful that you made your talk. As to the suspicion that you may be called naive, I have often had this adjective applied to myself and for such odd reasons that I have come to look upon it as a very distinct compliment. At the very least, it would seem to imply the opposite of deliberate racketeering."

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