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November 30, 1953

Dear Mr. Idar:

In Governor Adams' absence I am taking the liberty of acknowledging your most recent letter in further discussion of the labor problems on the Mexican border.

# I shall make a point of calling this to the Governor's attention upon his return, and know he will appreciate your continued interest.

Sincerely yours,

Charles F. Willis, Jr.  
Assistant to The Assistant

Mr. Ed Idar, Jr.  
Executive Secretary  
American GI Forum of Texas  
310 Nalle Building  
Austin, Texas

*Good*

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**AMERICAN GI FORUM OF TEXAS**  
INDEPENDENT VETERANS ORGANIZATION

310 NALLE BUILDING  
PHONE: 8-2410  
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November 18, 1953

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Hon. Sherman Adams  
The White House  
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Adams:

Enclosed please find copy of an article on the wetback problem that appeared in the October 24, 1953, issue of Business Week, a publication distributed solely among management men in business and industry.

While we feel there are one or two points made that we do not agree with, we feel that on the whole the article is a fair presentation of the problem. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that a publication of this type should publish such an article.

One of the little-known aspects of this problem is that dealing with the ill-effects that the problem has on the business and overall economy of the areas affected. We feel that too much attention has been paid to the socio-educational, health, welfare and other social aspects of the problem and not enough to its effects on business.

For this reason we feel sure you will want to read what this particular publication has published.

Sincerely yours,

*Ed Idar, Jr.*

Ed Idar, Jr.  
Executive Secretary

Article appearing in Pages 62-66 in October 24, 1953, issue of Business Week, a McGraw-Hill Publication which solicits subscriptions only from management-men in business and industry.

A full-length, two-column picture showing wetbacks wading a shall <sup>ow</sup> part of the Rio Grande was run with the article. Picture Outline says: ^

"Rio Grande is no barrier for these Mexican laborers who are wading a damp spot at Ciudad Juarez, near El Paso, Tex. This year set a new record for illegal crossings."

#### WETBACKS IN MIDDLE OF BORDER WAR

"The hottest problem facing California—and the nation."

This is how one federal official described the waders pictured at the left. The water in the photo is the Rio Grande; the men are illegal Mexican immigrants known as wetbacks. The government official who made the statement to the California Chamber of Commerce is John V. Newman of the Labor Dept.

Newman cited estimates of 3-million to 5-million illegal aliens—nearly all Mexicans—in the U.S.

"Malignant Threat"—As a worker in the Mexican bureau of the Labor Dept., Newman might be regarded as preoccupied with the national problem nearest to him. But his appraisal of the wetback problem was supported by Attorney General Herbert Brownell after a tour of the southwest border.

Brownell said wetback-smuggling "has mushroomed into a grave social problem involving murder, prostitution, robbery, and a gigantic narcotics infiltration . . . a malignant threat to the growth of our society."

Worst Year Yet—Tabulations lag, and figures aren't in yet for September, the big month for both legal and illegal importations of farm labor. But it is clear that 1953 is setting a new record for wetbacks.

Through the first eight months, seizures of illegal aliens added up

to nearly 700,000—that's about 16% more than the same months of 1952. And it's only a hint of the wetbacking that went on. Enforcement officers have a rule of thumb that two wetbacks go undetected for every one that's caught. This would put the total of illegal Mexican laborers at more than 2-million—with the biggest month of the year not yet tallied.

ECONOMICS—It's not love of travel that sends Mexicans across our 1,600-mi. border without benefit of entry permits. The lure is U.S. dollars. Back home, the peon can earn maybe 75¢ maybe \$1.25 a day; during harvesttime in Texas and California, he can get upward of \$3 a day.

Southwestern farmers depend on Mexican labor to harvest their crops each year. Some of this labor they get legally, through the U.S. Labor Dept. and the Mexican government. More than 200,000 braceros, as the legally imported Mexican workers are called, come into the U.S. under contract each year. They are paid 50¢ or 75¢ an hour, are shipped back to Mexico after the crops are in.

Legal imports of labor don't begin to fill the need of border ranches. That opens the door for wetbacks. Farmers count on the wetbacks to do their tedious "stoop labor" for 25¢ or 30¢ an hour. The labor saving can run to \$1,000 on 50 bales of cotton. And a really unscrupulous farmer doesn't even need to pay his wetbacks—he just lets them work till almost payday, then tips off the federal men to make a snatch before payoff time.

Pro and Anti—It's not surprising that the farmers fight every attempt to crack down on wetbacks. The farmers are short of domestic farm labor.

In Texas, another group besides the farmers is quietly grateful for the influx of wetbacks at harvesttime. Rio Grande Valley laborers go north, where the wages are better. This leaves the schools with heavy losses in per capita state aid unless the pupils are replaced. So the schools welcome the wetback children as replacements.

Businessmen oppose the wetback movement, however. The harvest months in the Rio Grande Valley are the poorest months in the year for retail sales: Many families move out then to better-paying farm jobs elsewhere and the Mexican workers, legal or illegal don't spend money locally.

"Remittances made by braderos to their homes amounted to \$30-million last year," said a Mexico City paper last spring, "and constituted the third-largest source of income to Mexico, after mining and tourists."

Also bitterly opposed to lax enforcement of immigration laws is organized labor. The National Farm Labor Union (AFL) seeks a law that would make it a felony to employ wetbacks. The present laws make it a felony only to hide, harbor, or transport illegal aliens—knowingly.

Nonfarm Labor—Other unions look on wetbacks as a threat to security

of nonfarm workers. Illegal aliens get into the country with fake birth certificates, social security cards, and even forged poll-tax receipts, in their pockets. They are turning up more and more in industrial centers.

The infiltration of trades by wetbacks was dramatically illustrated last summer during a convention of the California Grocers Assn. at the swank Del Coronado hotel in San Diego. Two thousand delegates were interrupted at luncheon by a U.S. Border Patrol raid that carried off 23 waiters and busboys—all wetbacks. The patrol had been tipped off by a regular hotel employee who had found no jobs open for American citizens.

Crime Angle—In late September, District Attorney Don C. Bitler of Imperial County, Calif., turned attention on another angle of the wetback problem. Bitler said that in the year ended June 30, Imperial County was invaded by over 500,000 wetbacks, of whom 237,000 were caught and deported.

According to Bitler, wetbacks were committing more than 80% of all crimes in the County, mostly petty thefts. He estimated added cost of enforcement at more than \$150,000.

In Hidalgo County, Tex., District Attorney J. R. Alamia said 75% of all felonies are committed by aliens. That includes 95% of the burglaries, 50% of the murders.

Enforcement Problem—Tighter control of the border to keep out wetbacks wouldn't be easy, even if farmers and their congressmen would stand for it.

The border runs 1,600 mi., from Brownsville, Tex., to the coast near San Diego, Calif. For 1953, the Border Patrol had 1,220 men. The Truman budget asked for 335 more, but the Eisenhower budget revision cut out all those and 11 others besides. And Congress cut the force by 200 more.

Easy Way In—A sample of the ease of entry is Imperial County's 80-mi. border between California and Mexico. Only 8½ mi. of this is fenced. Wetbacks are often found dead on the open deserts. Many hitch rides on trucks and trains. Four patrolmen collar an average of 1,000 wetbacks a month in the Los Angeles railroad yards.

*(Physical obstacle now that Falcon)*

The Rio Grande may be a greater <sup>^</sup>Dam, dedicated this week by President Eisenhower, is equalizing the flow of water. But in dry periods, enforcement at Brownsville has been a joke. Anyone could stand near the international bridge and watch wetbacks strolling across the dry riverbed.

Free Meals—Wetbacks who are caught are sent to detention camps, where they are fed and screened for deportation. Many come back day after day just for the free meals of bread and beans. After one big crackdown at Brownsville this year, Mexican officials of Matamoros complained loudly that some of their most reputable citizens were among the prisoners. And Brownsville citizens howled just as loudly for release of their wetback labor.

New Measures—To check the flood of wetbacks, the government is trying two new tacks:

Hauling the deported wetbacks to remote points by bus. Aliens picked up at El Paso this month are being hauled by Army buses "so far from El Paso that they can't return to their jobs the next day."

Enlisting aid of the Internal Revenue people in cracking down on farmers who employ wetbacks. Justice Dept. has announced that income tax returns will be checked against records of legal laborers. If payments claimed as business deductions don't check, the government will disallow the farmers' entire labor costs.