

Amnesty

Conservatives who saw through the fraud of the “temporary worker visa” program that President Bush unveiled in January and recognized it for the mass amnesty of illegal aliens it is might want to consider muting their fulminations against the concept of amnesty. If current demographic trends continue, they may find that they are in need of a little amnesty themselves once the country comes under the control of the new population that uncontrolled immigration is importing. Mr. Bush, of course, believes he can have the conservatives and the immigrants, too, and he is probably right about the former, despite their distaste for his proposal.

The political motivations of the Bush plan were transparent from the moment the President chose to announce it. It was the first major proposal issued by the White House in an election year, was largely the design of the President’s major political advisor Karl Rove, and was unbosomed at a White House ceremony to which only Hispanic leaders of Hispanic political organizations—the Hispanic Alliance for Progress, the Association for the Advancement of Mexican Americans, the Latino Coalition, and the League of United Latin American Citizens—were invited (aside from the obligatory Cabinet members, staffers, and tame congressmen). The plan incorporates almost every myth, fable, cliché, and outright lie about immigration in which the American mind has been pickled over the last 30 years, and the President himself in his brief remarks managed to repeat several of them: We are a nation of immigrants; America is based on a proposition; we need immigrants to do the jobs Americans will not take; Hispanic immigrants have strong family values. Unlike President Clinton—who, in controversial remarks about immigration at Portland State University a few years ago, emphasized the need for immigrants to assimilate—Mr. Bush issued no such encouragement. He was emphatic, however, in insisting that the plan he had just proposed was not amnesty. “I oppose amnesty, placing undocumented workers on the automatic path to citizenship.” That, of course, is not quite what amnesty is, but that Mr.

Bush’s characterization of his plan was not accurate is clear once you look at the details. In fact, the amnesty it offers is the least of its problems.

The President’s plan issues three-year “temporary work visas” to all “undocumented workers” already in the country. (The President used the euphemism that the left has, for several years, demanded replace *illegal aliens*; the latter expression, entirely accurate, is supposed to be too harsh and suggests that the laws they break to come here are legitimate.) The visas can then be extended for (presumably) another three years, after which the aliens will be eligible to apply for permanent legal residency, which is the road to full citizenship. As the President stated, “Some temporary workers will make the decision to pursue American citizenship. Those who make this choice will be allowed to apply in the normal way.”

Supposedly, the plan contains incentives for the aliens to return to their home countries—they can pay into tax-preferred savings accounts and the Social Security system and will be eligible for benefits from it as well as from the retirement systems of their own countries. This will allow them to build “a small nest egg,” which “is necessary to start their own business, or buy some land for their family.” That part of the plan is also a lie, though whether Mr. Bush expects it to fool the immigrants or Americans is not clear. It is preposterous to claim that benefits from any retirement system that the largely unskilled workers would acquire after working for only three (or six) years are enough to start a small business or buy land. Americans may believe that, but no worker, documented or not, does.

The amnesty the President’s plan offers consists of a legal road to citizenship for people who are now in this country illegally and who take part in the Temporary Worker Visa Program. It does, in fact, place “undocumented workers on the automatic path to citizenship” if they choose to walk up (or down) that path. The “incentives” the plan offers to return to their miserable, economically backward, corrupt, and often repressive or anarchic countries are a joke, compared to the opportunity to remain in this coun-



try legally forever. Why would they not choose to walk toward legal citizenship?

Yet the amnesty the plan offers is not the worst feature of it. Not only are all illegal aliens currently in the United States (the President used the figure 8 million, which is arguable, but other estimates place the number as high as 11 million) eligible to take part in the plan if they meet the few conditions (they must have a job in this country, it cannot be a job an American wants, and they have to abide by the law and the rules of the program), but any alien at all, anywhere in the world, can also take part in the Temporary Worker Visa Program. As Mr. Bush described the plan,

This program will offer legal status, as temporary workers, to the millions of undocumented men and women now employed in the United States, and to those in foreign countries who seek to participate in the program and have been offered employment here.

The foreigners who are not already here must have a job offer and must enter legally (though why they have to, when illegal aliens already here did not, isn’t clear). Other than those meager stipulations, there is no reason anyone—and everyone—in the rest of the world cannot invite himself to this country and contrive to stay for the rest of his life. Forget amnesty: What Mr. Bush’s plan does, in effect, is repeal every one of our current laws against immigration, period.

Given the speed and sophistication of global communications today, there is every reason to expect international job banks to be established (if they do not already exist) that will notify “workers” in Nigeria, Afghanistan, Myanmar, and everywhere else of “jobs” available to them

in the United States. Once they can arrange an “offer” from an “employer” (in return, if needed, for a healthy fee), all they will need to arrive here will be the plane ticket. Once here, there is no reason they would ever leave.

For all the obsession with “counterterrorism” and “national security” the Bush administration has displayed in the last few years, it is remarkable that the President never even mentioned the security aspects of his plan. What, in the arrangements he described, would prevent a member of Al Qaeda or any other terrorist, subversive, or criminal organization from finding himself a job “offer” in the United States and entering the country through the program? It is hard enough now (in fact impossible) to screen the million or more legal immigrants who arrive every year plus all the foreign visitors, students, businessmen, *etc.*, who come here. With the massive flood of alien workers who will apply for “temporary work visas” under the President’s plan, national-security procedures as well as current immigration laws will be effectively repealed.

It may be that, if and when the plan comes before Congress, and if and when it actually progresses toward enactment, someone will have enough sense to address and amend some of these flaws, but, if they are adequately addressed and remedied, there will not be much left of what Mr. Bush proposed. In any case, from the very moment of its birth, enactment seemed unlikely.

The Democrats at once denounced Mr. Bush’s brainstorm as inadequate and insufficient, since it failed to offer full citizenship on the spot to illegal aliens. They have no intention of letting the Republicans claim credit for an amnesty plan and indebting the next generation of the vast Hispanic voting bloc to the GOP. The Democrats will oppose the plan in Congress, and, if the Republicans actually manage to push it toward passage, they will try to stick in killer amendments that would either allow their own party to claim credit for amnesty or ensure that the plan would die in its legislative cradle.

As for the Republicans and their faithful conservative companions, they, for once, saw through what Mr. Bush was up to. The immediate response from “movement conservatives” in Washington was negative. *Human Events*, the American Conservative Union, the *Washington Times*, and even *National Review* all frowned on the plan. In Arizona, where

illegal immigration has become such a threat to American ranchers and homeowners that citizens’ organizations have formed to police the border themselves, an angry crowd of protestors greeted Rep. Jim Kolbe, a supporter of the Bush plan, with a load of garbage dumped on their property by illegal alien trespassers. The National Border Patrol Council, an organization representing 9,000 of the U.S. Border Patrol’s nonsupervisory agents, called the plan a “slap in the face to anyone who has ever tried to enforce the immigration laws of the United States” and vowed opposition to it. Polls showed that more than 50 percent of the public, and well more than that among Republicans, opposed the plan, and, by the time Mr. Bush delivered the State of the Union Address two weeks after announcing it, it was clear that the “guest worker program” had backfired badly. He skimmed over his reference to it quickly, to muted applause from the GOP faithful.

There were some who supported the plan, however, and they were neither the predictable Big Business lackeys who embraced it because of the promised army of cheap and docile labor nor Hispanic voters dazzled by the generosity and tolerance the Republicans had displayed but the neoconservatives, the same crowd of heavy-lifter superpatriots who have been crowing over the triumph of Democracy in Iraq, demanding more war everywhere, and spying out the antisemites amongst anyone who disagrees. Thus John Podhoretz, son of neocon guru Norman “World War IV” Podhoretz, enthusiastically praised the President’s plan in his column in the *New York Post*.

Mr. Podhoretz hailed the plan as a “far-reaching, innovative and compassionate revision of American immigration policy.” He liked it in part because of all its warm and fuzzy benefits for aliens but also and mainly because the plan would “transform not only the political debate in the United States but the Republican Party as well.”

Mr. Podhoretz was by no means the only neoconservative to slobber over the plan—almost at once and with one voice other neocons such as Linda Chavez, Jack Kemp, Jonah Goldberg, David Horowitz, Suzanne Fields, David Brooks in the *New York Times*, and Tamar Jacoby in the *Wall Street Journal*, as well as the *Weekly Standard*, endorsed the plan, even as paleoconservatives were rejecting it—but he was by far the most frank in praising it for the political damage it would in-

flict on real American conservatism.

Mr. Podhoretz’s argument was that the Republican Party, since the time of its support for the 1924 immigration law that established quotas to preserve the historic ethnic composition of the United States, has been “anti-immigrant,” and, if that means supportive of measures that restrict immigration, he is correct. In the 1990’s, he notes,

a sustained argument against immigration was being waged by certain conservative intellectuals—ranging from the respectable precincts of *National Review* to the hatemongering nativism growing like fetid algae in the Pat Buchanan fever swamps.

It is this orientation of the Republican Party and this “sustained argument against immigration” that Mr. Podhoretz (and, I daresay, the rest of the neocon mafia) believes the President’s plan will “transform” right out of the party and out of mainstream politics altogether.

Mr. Podhoretz is for the Bush plan and for mass immigration in general because he knows it will fracture the United States so seriously that anything like the “fever swamps” of the populist right and any other expression of authentic conservatism will dry up. Mr. Podhoretz’s hearty embrace of the immigration plan and the reasons he offers for embracing it are strikingly reminiscent of a sentiment I quoted in this column a few months ago, from former Brandeis University president Earl Raab. Speaking of the impact of immigration on national politics, Mr. Raab opined that “We have tipped beyond the point where a Nazi-Aryan party will be able to prevail in this country.” Neoconservatives, in other words, support mass immigration because it prevents forces they regard as “Nazi-Aryan” or “hate-mongering nativism” from mobilizing any serious political influence. And they may be correct that mass immigration has had or will have that effect.

Judging by the anger the President’s amnesty plan engendered among almost all other Americans, however, the transformation of the Republican Party that the plan will provoke may not be exactly what Mr. Podhoretz and his neocon cronies are expecting, much less one they would welcome.



by Scott P. Richert

This Is the Time to Remember

Every city is made up of innumerable stories, some overlapping, most not. And, thus, every city needs many storytellers to provide a full account of its life, because—humans being finite—no one is likely to be able to encompass all of those stories in his work. Few cities, however, are so lucky. The best most cities of any size can hope for is an Anthony Bukoski, who knows the East End of Superior, Wisconsin, as intimately as he knows himself—knows the people, the places, the history, even the way that both the physical and the human landscape of the East End change with every change of the seasons. For a city to have a second Bukoski would be a gift beyond imagining, and it would require an extraordinary people to be worthy of such a blessing.

These thoughts ran through my mind on the night of February 6, when, at the generous invitation of Alberto Altamore, more than 100 people from across Rockford gathered at Altamore Ristorante to mourn the passing of radio talk-show host Chris Bowman and to celebrate the life of a man who, over the past decade, was perhaps less of a storyteller himself than an editor and publisher of other people's stories—the people in that room, and many more besides. Rockford has not yet been blessed with even one Tony Bukoski, but, in the hands of Chris Bowman, the stories of these people had burst the bounds of their private lives and been woven together in a tapestry—incomplete, yes, and even a bit ragged, but that's a pretty good description of Rockford itself.

Many of us gathered there that night first came to know Chris during the 12-year-long struggle against federal-court control of the Rockford school district—Mary Hitchcock, the founder of Rockford Educating All Children (R.E.A.CH.) and Barb Dent, her successor as R.E.A.CH. chairman; Ted Biondo, Stephanie Caltagherone, Dave Strommer, and Patti Delugas, all school-board members during the height of the battle over court-ordered taxation (ultimately declared unconstitutional) to pay for the elaborate social-engineering scheme that resulted from the lawsuit filed by a group perversely known as People Who Care; activists Bill Me-

gan, Sr., and Bill Megan, Jr., Mark and CeCe Dahlgren, and Dick Kuberka, the unofficial historian of the desegregation suit; and many others who spent countless nights at school-board meetings and days collecting tax protests and, of course, calling Chris's show to discuss the latest developments.

Chris played a pivotal role in *Chronicles'* involvement in the battle over judicial taxation. Twenty-one years after John Howard founded The Rockford Institute, the Institute remained better known in London than in its hometown. Tom Fleming put the Institute and *Chronicles* on the local map with his February 1997 *Perspective* "Here Come the Judge," but it was Chris who distributed the updated map all over town when he read Tom's words on the air. Over the next seven years, Tom would become one of Chris's most-frequent (and most-favorite) guests, commenting on everything from local politics and national culture to foreign policy and international affairs. And Chris hosted both of The Rockford Institute's local forums on judicial taxation, in February of 1997 and 1998.

When the local Gannett paper, the *Rockford Register Star*, which officially supported the school-desegregation lawsuit, grew alarmed over the incipient tax rebellion and decided to kill the messenger, running an unprecedented two-day front-page series accusing the Institute of racism, Chris turned the airwaves over to Tom for days on end to defend our position. A moderately conservative Republican himself (in the 1980's, he had been chief of staff to Illinois Congresswoman Lynn Martin, deputy executive director of the National Republican Congressional Committee, and political director of the Republican National Committee), Chris did not agree with all of our positions (he was, for instance, never pro-life, though, in recent years, he had begun to have his doubts about the pro-abortion position), but he realized that the Institute and *Chronicles*—unlike the "local" daily—shared his devotion to his hometown, and that was enough to command his loyalty.

Chris's devotion to Rockford was evident in his decision, after a decade in



Washington, D.C., to return to his hometown and begin a career in radio. Over the years, he was repeatedly condemned as a "naysayer," even by some (such as *Register Star* political editor Chuck Sweeney) who now find that label attached to themselves. If Chris's daily program often came across as negative, however, it was because, through his criticisms of local politicians, developers, and businessmen, he was calling on all Rockfordians to make his hometown—suffering from the identity crisis that has afflicted working-class cities across the Midwestern Rust Belt—the kind of city he remembered from his childhood. If anything, Chris was too much of an idealist, often allowing himself to be talked into supporting ballot proposals and programs—such as the open-ended one-cent sales-tax increase in 2002 to build a new jail for Winnebago County—that he later realized worked against his vision for Rockford. He always tried to make good on his mistakes, however. His devotion to the fight last fall to protect St. Mary's Oratory from the grasping hands of county-board members and officials, for instance, was fueled by his sense of betrayal over the way the jail tax was being used.

When we first introduced this column in *Chronicles* (as a "Letter From Rockford" written by Chris's friend and sometime competitor Frank Schier, the editor and publisher of the weekly *Rock River Times*), we asked Chris to write for us. A busy man, he never did, but, when the column fell to me, I often turned to his show for inspiration. In our last chat, just two days before he fell ill and another three before he passed away, he urged me to devote my March column to the Rockford Area Chamber of Commerce's "One Region, Four Rivers" initiative. "Go get 'em," he said, before he abruptly signed off, without saying goodbye. <e