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## Democrats offer plan on aliens

By Amy Fagan

THE WASHINGTON TIMES

House Democrats yesterday proposed granting legal residency and the eventual option of U.S. citizenship to millions of illegal immigrants now working in the United States.

Laying out their own principles for revamping the nation's immigration laws in response to what House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi called President Bush's "political ploy," Democrats went beyond Mr. Bush's plan for a temporary-worker program and called for a system of "earned legalization" for illegal aliens.

At a Capitol Hill press conference, Democrats proposed allowing illegal immigrants who have worked in the United States for a yet-to-be-determined minimum period of time to stay here and be granted permanent legal residency, creating a "pathway" to eventual citizenship.

"The president's proposal is a political ploy, and not the solid foundation on which we can build an improved immigration policy," said Mrs. Pelosi of California. "Democrats have a better way."

Mrs. Pelosi said Mr. Bush's recently proposed plan doesn't create a meaningful way for illegal aliens to become U.S. residents or citizens; doesn't reduce the backlog of U.S. citizens' petitions on behalf of relatives who are here illegally; and doesn't help tens of thousands of teenage illegals attend college here and eventually be granted legal status.

In addition to proposing measures to address those concerns, Democrats endorsed a temporary-worker program that would give foreigners the option to stay in the United States and eventually earn permanent legal

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status here.

President Bush's plan, in contrast, would allow illegal aliens already here, as well as newcomers, to work in the United States legally for three years under a temporary-worker program. When their three-year permits expired, such immigrant workers would be required to return to their home countries.

Once back in their home countries, they could apply for legal U.S. status through the existing system. Under the Bush plan, the three-year work permits could be extended in some cases, but not indefinitely.

"The president wants to give [illegal aliens] a lot, but the Democrats want to give them the jackpot," said Steve Camarota, director of research at the Center for Immigration Studies.

Sen. John Cornyn, the Texas Republican sponsor of legislation that essentially mirrors Mr. Bush's proposal, said requiring workers to eventually return to their home country will reduce future illegal immigration by strengthening struggling foreign economies.

"In my recent visit with government leaders in Mexico City, I was repeatedly told that they want their workers to come back, to return home with capital and skills," he said. "They need those small-business owners, those entrepreneurs to strengthen a weakened middle class."

Mr. Cornyn's bill and Mr. Bush's proposal would provide incentives for immigrants to return home after their legal work period here expires.

But Democrats like Rep. Luis V. Gutierrez, Illinois Democrat, said it would be unfair and unworkable to deport immigrants who have worked in the United States for many years. He praised Mr. Bush for opening the door to immigration changes, but said the government won't be able to enforce Mr. Bush's plan.

"There is not the political will ... to conduct that massive deportation," he said.

Mr. Camarota agreed.

"At least the Democrats are realistic," he said, adding that illegal immigrants in the United States, "aren't going home now and they're not going to go home with President Bush's proposal."

Democrats propose allowing foreign-born minors who are here illegally to stay in the United States, attend college and eventually earn legal status. Democrats said that "at minimum" they support a bill, already approved by the Senate Judiciary Committee, to allow states to grant in-state college tuition rates to illegal-alien students. That bill would also authorize federal officials to halt deportation of such students and allow the students to eventually become permanent U.S. residents.

Mrs. Pelosi said if Mr. Bush were serious about improving the system, he would call for immediate action on the House counterpart to that Senate bill, as well as another House bill that would allow 500,000 illegal agricultural workers to become legal permanent residents.

Democrats also propose enhanced family-reunification provisions. They seek reinstatement of a law that would allow illegal immigrants, sponsored by immediate family members who are U.S. citizens, to stay in the United States and apply for legal status, instead of being forced to return to their home countries before seeking legal admission. Mr. Bush tried to revive that law in the past, but it was "beaten down in the House," Mr. Camarota said, and the measure is not part of Mr. Bush's most recent proposal.

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