

[Skip to article](#)

- [Welcome, ctzcrank](#)
- [Member Center](#)
- [Log Out](#)
- [Home Page](#)
- [My Times](#)
- [Today's Paper](#)
- [Video](#)
- [Most Popular](#)
- [Times Topics](#)

- [Opinion](#)
- [All NYT](#)

The New York Times

Opinion

- [World](#)
- [U.S.](#)
- [N.Y. / Region](#)
- [Business](#)
- [Technology](#)
- [Science](#)
- [Health](#)
- [Sports](#)
- [Opinion](#)
 - [Editorials](#)
 - [Columnists](#)
 - [Contributors](#)
 - [Letters](#)
 - [N.Y./Region Opinions](#)
 - [Readers' Opinions](#)
 - [The Public Editor](#)
- [Arts](#)
- [Style](#)
- [Travel](#)
- [Jobs](#)
- [Real Estate](#)

- [Autos](#)

Editorial

Hazy Days of Immigration

- [E-Mail](#)
- [Print](#)
- [Save](#)

ARTICLE TOOLS
SPONSORED BY



Published: July 20, 2006

Washington's immigration debate is stuck in the political doldrums, becalmed and hot, going nowhere. The hard task of making policy has been set aside for a summer of theater.

Hearings called by the House and Senate to examine the issue have no actual purpose except to promote visions of the immigrants as action figures of either incredible virtue or inestimable villainy. On the Senate side, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Peter Pace, choked up when recalling the struggles of his father, who came from Italy. Meanwhile, in San Diego and Laredo, Tex., sheriffs summoned to hearings by House Republican leaders spun haunting stories of faux-Mexican Al Qaeda beasts lurking below the border.

In Washington, there is no hint of compromise. The feeling grows that any hope of an immigration overhaul is dead for the year.

Except in the states, where legislatures and city governments doggedly propose or enact laws to control their small patches of the immigration battleground. Most veer toward harshness, to milk anti-immigrant passions. The mayor of Avon Park, Fla., concocts a decree that people may rent homes only to duly proven legal residents, or face stringent fines. He says he got the idea from the mayor of Hazleton, Pa., who got it from San Bernardino, Calif.

Colorado moves to cut off illegal immigrants from food stamps, supplemental security income and Medicaid, and to force businesses to prove that all their employees have papers. In Suffolk County, N.Y., Executive Steve Levy proposes a similar employee-verification law.

Certainly, companies should not be allowed to flout the law and exploit immigrants. But the states' and cities' strenuous exertions do not add up to serious reform. They do nothing to impose order or consistency where it's needed: at the federal level.

The status quo — localities running wild in a federal vacuum, hidden communities of fearful immigrants bracing for the worst, immigrant-dependent businesses unwilling and unable to get right with the law — is a parody of sensible governing. Returning to lawfulness and order means realizing that security is just one part of the solution. Tapping immigrants' energies by opening a path to legal status and eventual citizenship will reinforce the rule of law and strengthen the nation far more than throwing money at a militarized border.

Mayor Michael Bloomberg of New York City said it well, at a Senate hearing: "It's as if we expect border control agents to do what a century of communism could not: defeat the natural market forces of supply and demand and defeat the natural human desire for freedom and opportunity. You might as well sit on your beach chair and tell the tide not to come in."

[Next Article in Opinion \(2 of 11\) »](#)

Related Articles

-  [Once Again, Gazans Are Displaced by Israeli Occupiers \(July 12, 2006\)](#)
- [A Deal in Colorado on Benefits for Illegal Immigrants \(July 12, 2006\)](#)
-  ['Pit Bull' of the House Latches On to Immigration \(July 11, 2006\)](#)
-  [House and Senate Hold Immigration Hearings \(July 6, 2006\)](#)

Related Searches

- [Immigration and Refugees](#)
- [Politics and Government](#)
- [Pace, Peter](#)
- [Levy, Steve](#)

[Next Article in Opinion \(2 of 11\) »](#)

Inside NYTimes.com



TimesSelect

[Sports »](#)

[World »](#)

TimesSelect

[U.S. »](#)

[Arts »](#)



Video: Brooks, Dowd and Rich on Politics

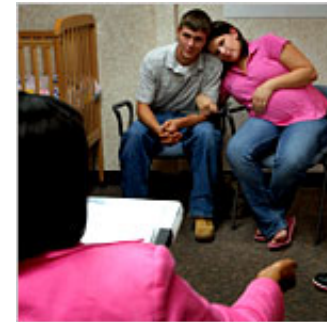


Japan Goes Channel Surfing



East Germany Museum in Berlin

 **Anderson: Hot Time in the Old Town**
 High temperatures promise a dry and fast course at the British Open.



Fight Poverty by Building Family Ties



Anecdotal Evidence of Homesick Mankind

Home

- [World](#)
- [U.S.](#)
- [N.Y. / Region](#)
- [Business](#)

- [Technology](#)
- [Science](#)
- [Health](#)
- [Sports](#)
- [Opinion](#)
- [Arts](#)
- [Style](#)
- [Travel](#)
- [Jobs](#)
- [Real Estate](#)
- [Automobiles](#)
- [Back to Top](#)

Copyright 2006 The New York Times Company

- [Privacy Policy](#)
- [Search](#)
- [Corrections](#)
- [XML](#)
- [Help](#)
- [Contact Us](#)
- [Work for Us](#)
- [Site Map](#)

• •