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President's plan draws mixed reaction in S.C.

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Local supporters of the Hispanic immigrant movement and some Spartanburg residents are raising eyebrows at President Bush's plan to handle the flood of immigrants at the U.S.-Mexico border.

South Carolina lawmakers in Washington, meanwhile, say the president is on the right track.

On Monday evening, Bush outlined his plan to control illegal immigration and create a guest-worker program for immigrants.

That plan includes sending 6,000 National Guard troops to protect the 2,000-mile border.

But S.C. National Guard spokesman Pete Brooks said the Palmetto state is not being asked to send soldiers.

"We're not anticipating any change," Brooks said. "We haven't had any indication that South Carolina will be involved at all."

Southeastern coastal states have obvious concerns about troop availability with hurricane season on the horizon, said Joel Sawyer, spokesman for Gov. Mark Sanford.

Though South Carolina's National Guard remains untouched by Bush's plans, many local people still have strong opinions on the president's approach.

At the Spartanburg Mi Tierra Mexican grocery store, manager Salvador Torres said sending thousands of troops made little sense.

"I don't think it's going to work," said Torres, 32. "It's not the way to fix the problem. They are going to spend a lot of money with all these people.

"There are too many laws in place. They got to enforce them."

His 27-year-old brother, Agustin, agreed, but said the guest-worker program was a good idea.

"That'll be fine," Agustin Torres said. "They need us (Hispanics) as much as we need them."

Spartanburg resident Steve Harvey also supports the guest-worker program.

"I think the president is right, you can't address illegal immigration without addressing the fact that people are desperate to come here for jobs," Harvey said. "And since there are jobs available for them in this country, I think it's natural and very reasonable to set up a program to match up workers with those jobs."

Louise H. Jones, a 61-year-old Spartanburg native, said she's fed up with what she considers to be minimal enforcement of immigration laws.

But beefing up the border patrol wouldn't fix America's current problem, Jones said.

"That may stop what we got coming in, but that's just a Band-Aid," Jones said. "He (Bush) has not done anything to correct what is here."

Despite the president's comments in opposition to amnesty, Jones said the guest-worker program was granting just that.

"That is rewarding crooks, robbers, illegals," Jones said. "If you come over here and stay hidden long enough, the president is going to say its OK."

On Capitol Hill

Meanwhile in Washington, Rep. Bob Inglis said he supported Bush's open-ended plan to send National Guard troops to the border, adding that an increase in enlistments is likely to follow.

"It makes sense to use the military at the border, and to make sure to strengthen the border patrol forces that we have ... many Americans would want to help with that mission," Inglis said.

The National Guard deployment does not signal a war on illegal immigrants or a militarization of the border, he said, but a "need to control the flow" of people.

The South Carolina Republican said he could support a guest-worker program as long as it is coupled with stricter border controls.

Getting into the country through legal channels should be easier for those who want to work here, Inglis said. In the "heyday of Ellis Island," he said, as many as a million people a year were allowed to enter the country.

Sen. Jim DeMint said, "Any measure to strengthen our border security would be better than what we have now." Illegal immigration, he said, is a threat to the country's national security.

DeMint, a Republican, said he could support a temporary worker system, but would not endorse "amnesty," which rewards "illegal behavior with citizenship or voting rights."

William Frey, an immigration expert at the Brookings Institute, said the president's decision might affect immigrants who are thinking about crossing the border, but more likely it is a "symbolic" gesture for concerned voters.

"At some point it actually is going to make a difference, but you have to realize that a lot of the undocumented immigrants aren't people who cross the border, they're people who overstay their visas," Frey said.

Staff writer Blathnaid Healy contributed to this report.

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