of us. These 8 million workers are an integral part of our society, and reality dictates that we recognize that and find a fair way to integrate them fully into our society. We can do this while still protecting the labor standards in this country by wage and hour enforcements. We need to take our failing immigration system and turn it into something that can work for all Americans. And failing it is. We have a huge, and I mean a huge, backlog of visa applications pending that are preventing husbands from being with their wives and parents from being with their children.

The current delay in reunifying families from the Philippines is 22 years. Is this a humane system? That is outrageous. Not only do we have to speed up the process; we have to make more family and employment visas available. This bottleneck needs to be opened up. The first and foremost action we should take to fix our immigration system is to bring families back together and allow them to be reunified. Sadly, however, the Bush proposal does nothing to help solve the problem of family reunification.

Secondly, we need to offer a future to those immigrants who have been working in this country for years, have paid their taxes, abided by our laws, and contributed to their communities all over this Nation. The fact is that they are here now, and they have earned their right to stay. While some may not have come through the proper channels, they should not be condemned outright for leaving despair and poverty behind for a better life. These workers have had a positive impact on this country through their contributions, and a guest-worker program alone does not even begin to acknowledge this reality.

Not only does earned legalization take this hidden work force out of the shadows, but it provides certainty for employers and hope for the employees that they can work towards a meaningful goal: legitimate acceptance in the United States. Another reality is that the immigrant children of these workers also deserve a place in our society. It is only to our benefit that they have access to a good education. They should be granted a vehicle for obtaining lawful permanent status and qualify for in-state educational benefits and financial aid.

Again, the Democrats take this into account in the overall debate on immigration reform, but the Republican Party chooses to ignore this quick and easy change that could go forward right away without further delay.

The Bush administration and the Republican leadership also ignore the fact that legislation already exists to expand the current guest-worker program. If President Bush is serious about moving forward on immigration reform and not just playing election-year politics, he should call on the Republican majority in the House to pass the Berman Ag Jobs bill. We can get this done now.

Finally, let us focus our national security efforts on protecting this Nation against real terrorist threats instead of using it as an excuse to round up 8 million law-abiding workers and kicking them out of this country. I do not know about other Members, but I would much rather have the Department of Homeland Security knowing the identities of the people living here because they are no longer hiding from authorities for fear of deportation.

Let us get real about the immigration dilemma in this country, real about the kind of hard-working, sincere people these immigrants are, how they have benefited this country, and what it would take to put the immigration system back in working order. Let us take our heads out of the sand and get to work on real immigration reform. I am serious about the work ahead, and I challenge my colleagues in the House to give more than lip service to the idea of meaningful immigration reform.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. RODRIGUEZ) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. RODRIGUEZ addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

MEDICARE PRESCRIPTION DRUG LEGISLATION

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 7, 2003, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PALLONE) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, I come to the House floor tonight to once again highlight several questionable activities by Republicans during and after the Medicare prescription drug legislation passed the House of Representatives last year.

Seniors have already begun to voice their opposition to the new prescription drug bill, as well they should. Seniors know that the Republican bill forces seniors to get their prescription drug benefits outside of Medicare. They have already calculated the supposed prescription drug benefit they would be getting under the law and realize that it is minuscule.

Just to cite some examples, consider that seniors with a thousand dollars in annual prescription drug costs would pay $857 out of their own pockets; or that those seniors with prescription drug costs of $5,000 a year would be forced to pay $3,920. Now I ask: What kind of benefit is that? If seniors are not getting the money, where is the $500 billion that it is now estimated that this prescription drug so-called benefit would cost the Federal Government? Where is the money going if it is not coming to the senior citizens?

There is no doubt in my mind that both Republicans here in the House and in the Bush administration are concerned that seniors are not buying this plan. Many of our seniors have contacted us and told us that this is a terrible plan and it is not going to help seniors, and it is a boondoggle for the special interests, HMOs, and the pharmaceutical companies. I think what is happening is the Republican leadership here in the House and President Bush and his administration realize that the public thinks, rightly so, that this Republican prescription drug plan for seniors is a farce. So last week we got wind of the fact that the Bush administration's Department of Health and Human Services was going to spend $22 million to rebut criticism, and this was stated by the administration, to ''rebut criticism of the new Medicare law through an advertising campaign on television and through the mail.''

Some may have already seen these ads. I think it is outrageous. I have to say that here we are talking about how bad this bill is as part of our free speech that we all exercise, and seniors are saying it is a bad bill, and the Bush administration has the gall to now spend $22 million in taxpayer money to try in their own terms, and I quote, to ''rebut criticism of the new Medicare law.''

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I think the American public should be concerned that the President is spending $22 million of the taxpayers' money, money that could be used to actually help seniors with their prescription drug bills, than trying to rebut legitimate criticism of the Republican and the Bush administration Medicare prescription drug plan.

President Bush should be concerned that seniors are not buying his prescription drug bill, but maybe, instead of spending taxpayers' money to try to rebut legitimate criticism, he should be talking about how he could change the bill. Or, alternatively, if the President wants to use his own campaign dollars, he has amassed about $150 million in campaign contributions over the last couple of years, a lot of which has come from the pharmaceutical and the insurance industry, if he feels that he needs to rebut the criticism, then let him spend money out of his own campaign war chest from those same people that he helped in creating this terrible legislation. Do not use the taxpayers' money to do it.

The Republicans are saying, and this is what I have heard, they claim they are just trying to inform seniors about the new prescription drug plan with this taxpayer-paid ad campaign. One of the ways that you know that that is not the case is that the Department of Health and Human Services decided to use the same media firm that is working on advertising for President Bush's reelection campaign. We know there are a lot of advertising agencies out there, but why would the Department of Health and Human Services just happen to choose National Media, Inc.,