

TUNE IN TO THE
SOUND OF DEMOCRACY

Justice Talking Radio Transcript

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The Senate is considering sweeping reforms that give some undocumented immigrants a chance to become permanent residents and citizens. But the proposals have met with stiff opposition from those who want to focus immigration reform on tightening our borders and punishing or deporting illegal immigrants. On this edition of Justice Talking we take a thorough look at immigration policy and border security. We'll ask if there is a way to prevent illegal border crossings, accommodate the need for guest workers and preserve our heritage as a nation of immigrants.

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MARGOT ADLER: This is Justice Talking. I'm Margot Adler. Most Americans don't have to go that far back to remember when their families immigrated to the U.S. We say we are a country of immigrants. Despite this, Americans are sharply divided on what our immigration policy should be. Some think that we need to tighten our borders and prevent more people from coming into the U.S. Others say that we need illegal immigrants—that they are doing jobs that American workers won't do. President Bush has called for compromise, proposing a guest worker program and the deployment of 6,000 National Guard troops to patrol the border with Mexico.

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH: There is a rational middle ground between granting an automatic path to citizenship for every illegal immigrant and a program of mass deportation.

MARGOT ADLER: What should our country's immigration policy be? More after the news.

MARGOT ADLER: This is Justice Talking. I'm Margot Adler. On today's show: illegal immigration. There are 12 million people in this country who by law aren't supposed to be here. That's about the populations of New York City and Los Angeles combined. On today's show, we'll look at what our country's policy should be and the effect of illegal immigration on our economy. Then we'll head to the front lines of the debate in Arizona where more illegal immigrants enter the country than anyplace else. We'll hear from two people who volunteer at the Arizona-Mexico border. One tries to assist and the other tries to catch people crossing the border illegally.

But first, to find out where most of our country's immigrants come from and to learn about patterns of migration, I called Doug Massey, a sociology professor at Princeton University. He co-directs the Mexican Migration Project. Welcome Doug.

DOUG MASSEY: My pleasure.

MARGOT ADLER: You devote your time to studying Mexican migration. Tell us about the Mexican Migration Project—who you talk to, where you go and what you've learned.

DOUG MASSEY: Every year we go into Mexico, me and my colleague Jose Durand, who's at the University of Guadalajara. We go in together and choose four to six communities in Mexico in different states, in different parts of the country, and we do our representative random survey of the community.

MARGOT ADLER: And when you look at what you've found, what are the most surprising findings?

DOUG MASSEY: Well, nothing is very surprising to me after all this time, but I think most Americans would be surprised that the typical migrant, when they come to the United States, is really not looking to settle here permanently. Rather, they're seeking to use the U.S. labor market in some instrumental fashion to solve an economic problem at home. The most common economic problem they're trying to solve is to finance the construction or acquisition of a house in the absence of any good mortgage market in Mexico. Really, for common people, that's the only way they can get a house. And so they migrate once, twice, three times, stay for one to two years each time, build their house, and then they tend to go back and retire and enjoy the home they've acquired.

MARGOT ADLER: Now how do people travel back and forth across the border?

DOUG MASSEY: Well, getting into the United States involves a variety of subterfuges. On the one hand, you can use a false document and try to go through a regular border crossing, but then you have the risk of getting caught if they spot that it's a fake document. Among migrants, there are a lot of traded documents as well. So one brother who has a legal green card will lend it to his other brother and they look kind of alike and they'll go back and forth across the border, using the same document. Probably the most common way of crossing for Mexicans is to go across the border without an official inspection. So going

across illegally and clandestinely with or without a paid guide, as it's gotten more difficult over time, more people are using paid guides. And the cost of these guides, which are called coyotes, has increased dramatically.

MARGOT ADLER: And if the U.S. goes through with some of the proposals to strengthen the border, to build a fence on the border with Mexico, how do you think that will affect migration patterns?

DOUG MASSEY: Well, it's simply going to continue the trends that we've seen develop over the past 10 to 15 years. That is, you may have some modest affect of reducing the rate of entry but that'll be swamped by a much bigger effect in reducing the rate of return migration among people who are already here. It'll continue to backfire and will further increase the size of the undocumented population that's living north of the border.

MARGOT ADLER: So much of a current debate around immigration focuses on Mexican immigrants. Who are the other immigrants that come to America? Where are the hot spots for immigrants to enter the country?

DOUG MASSEY: The largest number of immigrants coming in undocumented status are obviously from Mexico. They are about 60 percent of the undocumented population. Aside from Mexicans, the next big chunk are Central Americans. And if you add in the Central Americans, that's probably around 20 percent more of the population, or 25 percent even. So about 80 percent to 85 percent is really from Latin America and the Caribbean.

MARGOT ADLER: Thanks for talking with us today. Doug Massey is a sociology professor at Princeton University and co-directs the Mexican Migration Project.

MARGOT ADLER: We've talked about how illegal immigrants cross the border to the U.S., but what happens when they start to build a life here? I met with Daisy Avidia. She lives in New York City. She came to the U.S. from Mexico City when she was 12 on a visitor's visa and never left. She went to California Public Schools. I asked her if being an illegal immigrant bothered her but she said it didn't until her junior year in high school when one of her teachers pulled her aside and asked her a question.

DAISY AVIDIA: Where are you going to go to college? And, you know, I went to talk to my counselor to find out that at that time in California if I wanted to continue my education, I would have to pay out-of-state tuition. So basically my counselor let me know that there were no options for me and she suggested that I look for work at a Pic 'N' Save. That's synonymous with Big Lots.

MARGOT ADLER: She didn't want working at a bargain retail store to be her future. After she graduated from high school, she married her high school boyfriend who was a U.S.

citizen. As her legal status changed, so did her options. She could then access financial aid and finally attend UCLA and then went on to Harvard for a master's degree.

DAISY AVIDIA: I couldn't have done that if I didn't have that piece of paper that kind of gave me access to that. And then I feel so much that it was partly, you know, that I persevered and, you know, some personal attributes. But it's mainly that piece of paper, because I know that like my oldest sister and my brother, they have as much as I have, as much will, but they don't have those papers, so they can't do it.

MARGOT ADLER: And they're still undocumented?

DAISY AVIDIA: They're still undocumented, yeah. My oldest sister, she's working in a retail store and my younger brother is working in construction.

MARGOT ADLER: Now Avidia works at the New York Immigration Coalition.

MARGOT ADLER: Not everyone has the opportunities that Avidia had. Some people say that illegal immigrants shouldn't have the same access to education that citizens do. Michigan lawmakers are considering a measure to prevent illegal immigrants from getting access to state merit scholarships. From Michigan, Adam Allington has this report.

ADAM ALLINGTON: Michigan grows about 300 million pounds of cherries annually, making it the cherry capital of the country. On the floor of the Leelanau Fruit Company, they're processing last year's sweet cherries into canned maraschinos. Julia Reeves walks me through the busy plant. She's been working in the Michigan cherry industry for well over a decade.

JULIA REEVIS: The person in the back is squishing the fruit up to the elevator, coming through the tumble wheel. This is a tumble wheel. Mainly what she does is take care of the [unintelligible] so they don't get overfilled.

ADAM ALLINGTON: Cherries are big busy in Northwest Michigan. It's also the northern frontier of a stream of migrant farm workers that stretches all the way to California, Texas and Florida. The children of these migrants spend part of the year attending Michigan schools. Mike Hartigan is the superintendent for Leland Public Schools in Leland, Michigan.

MIKE HARTIGAN: Migrants have been coming to Leelanau County for decades and it just seems a natural flow to us. The same families come back year after year. We can know where they are and what class to put them in and that their educational level was from the prior year.

ADAM ALLINGTON: Hartigan stresses that just because a student is a migrant doesn't mean that he's illegal. Many are citizens. Some are legal permanent residents. Still, he's

worried that because of the recent focus on illegal immigration, the government might start requiring schools to verify student citizenship.

MIKE HARTIGAN: As far as how they got into this country, it's not something that the schools can really deal with. You know, we're a long way from the border here in Michigan. Our job as educators is to take every child that comes here and just work very hard with that child every day and to get them as far along with their educational process as we possibly can, and that's what we intend to do.

GLORIA: My family were migrants ever since I remember. We've traveled to Florida, Georgia, Minnesota, just following the crops.

ADAM ALLINGTON: Gloria is an 18-year-old senior about to graduate from high school in Traverse City. She wouldn't use her real name because after eight years of living in the U.S., she's still not a legal resident. Gloria wants to go to college to become a nurse.

GLORIA: Both of my parents, they would always give me the example of: picture yourself 20 years from now working in the fields or going to college, doing a career, something that you like, better pay, and they would always encourage me, go to school, go to school. Now that you have the opportunity, you can go to school. We didn't have the opportunity.

ADAM ALLINGTON: Because of her grades, Gloria is eligible for a merit scholarship to attend a local community college. However, she doesn't think she'll be able to take this scholarship because she doesn't have a Social Security number. Situations like Gloria's are becoming more common as a generation of undocumented high school students want to go to college. Without a Social Security number, options are limited. Students can apply as an international or pay expensive out-of-state tuition. Pam Horne is director of admissions for Michigan State University.

PAM HORNE: There are students that are being left out of pursuing higher education. The challenge with having a student eligible for in-state tuition is that for many of these, even with in-state tuition, without federal financial aid that is need-based, college is still not an economic possibility for them.

ADAM ALLINGTON: The Michigan House of Representatives recently passed a bill to eliminate undocumented students from eligibility for state merit scholarships. Robert Gosselin is a Republican from Troy who voted in favor of the bill. Gosselin believes that before illegal immigrants are allowed to reap the benefits of the system, they need to come out of the shadows.

ROBERT GOSSELIN: They should seek the process of citizenship. And the bills that I've introduced, which basically address illegal students, put the caveat in there that if you are in a process of obtaining American citizenship, these bills should not apply to you. So that's what I would encourage them to do. Let's do it up front, above-board. We're a nation of laws. We don't want chaos. And what we have now is chaos on this issue.

ADAM ALLINGTON: There is a bill pending a vote in Washington that would address this very issue. It's called the DREAM Act or the Development Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act. The DREAM Act would allow undocumented students who've graduated from American schools the opportunity to attend college or enlist in the military and become legal residents in the process. The Act has received bi-partisan support from both the House and Senate Judiciary Committees. But as the national debate on immigration reform continues, the future of the DREAM Act remains uncertain. For NPR's Justice Talking, I'm Adam Allington in Michigan.

MARGOT ADLER: Coming up: Is it true that illegal immigrants will take jobs that Americans refuse to do?

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: We need to make sure that we do not use the issue of immigration as a sort of a fear or paranoia or to promote xenophobia in our country.

MARGOT ADLER: Illegal immigration, employment and the economy. Stay with us.

MARGOT ADLER: This is Justice Talking. I am Margot Adler. We're talking about immigration. What should our country's policy be? Joining me to talk about this are Christian Ramirez and James Edwards. Christian Ramirez is an organizer for Project Voice, an immigrant rights initiative of the American Friend Service Committee. James Edwards is an adjunct fellow at the Hudson Institute, a think tank in Washington, D.C. He believes in tougher immigration policies. Christian, America prides itself as being a country based on laws. Many ask: Why should illegal behavior be rewarded? Why should undocumented immigrants be able to jump ahead of others who've been waiting for years to get into the country?

CHRISTIAN RAMIREZ: Well, we have to recognize a couple of things before we make assumptions about illegality and criminality. First, we have to remember that our country has grown more and more dependent on the undocumented work force. And without a doubt, the current immigration laws are being broken by the undocumented immigration, but that's as a result of the new economic policies that we've implemented in Latin America and elsewhere, and the fact that the immigrants who are coming here are coming here as a result of a supply and demand dynamic that's existing as economic policies are being implemented between Mexico and the United States. So as long as we have poor opportunities for Mexicans and other Latin American countries, for people to stay there, and as long as we continue to hire undocumented migrants, no matter what policy we implement, if we don't address the root causes of migration, we'll continue to have the undocumented flow of migrants into the United States.

MARGOT ADLER: James, we've all gotten to the United States because of immigrants: our parents, our grandparents, our great-great-great-great-grandparents. Do you believe, as

President Bush said in his recent speech on immigration, that we can be a lawful society and a welcoming society?

JAMES EDWARDS: No doubt. We are the most rule of law-oriented society and the most welcoming society of any in the world. America accepts more legal immigrants than any other country in the world. And so the two certainly always have and should exist together.

MARGOT ADLER: But you clearly believe something should change now?

JAMES EDWARDS: Well, number one, we ought to start enforcing the laws on the books. And number two is we ought to add to those in a way that takes the enforcement route first before we assume that there is some inevitable flow of people that's unstoppable. I just reject that out-of-hand. That's not based on fact or anything other than wishful thinking and myth.

MARGOT ADLER: Christian, how do you answer the argument that our country has a finite number of resources? Doesn't more bodies mean less to go around? Aren't illegal immigrants a drain on our schools, on our health care system, our economy?

CHRISTIAN RAMIREZ: Well, you know, I think that we have to look at some of the myths and some of the facts about migration. The fact is that immigrants do contribute to the economy of the United States and yes, immigrants in this nation should be entitled to basic rights, to basic services. Immigrants contribute enormously to the development of our nation. They do much of the work that many of us won't do, and the more that this country is depending on those services, the more that we need the undocumented labor force in this country. So it's about time to regularize migrants in this nation. It's about time to recognize the work and reward the fact that immigrants are doing the work that many of us won't do.

MARGOT ADLER: James, how would you answer Christian?

JAMES EDWARDS: I would say that he needs to study economics 101. It's virtually agreed that the vast majority of the flow of immigrants today is primarily at the lower skills and education level. It's virtually agreed by all reputable economists that there is a high correlation between education level or skill level and earnings, and the extent to which people are contributors as opposed to a net loss to our society, a net drain on our society highly correlates to that education and skills base. And we are being drained by the majority of those in the immigrant population.

MARGOT ADLER: Christian?

CHRISTIAN RAMIREZ: Well, you know, Social Darwinism is not an economic policy. We have folks who are working in the fields of our nation, who are picking the crops in California; we have folks who are being used as construction workers; who clean our bathrooms, who clean our homes; who take care of our children. We need to make sure

that we do not use the issue of immigration as a sort of fear or paranoia or to promote xenophobia in our country. We have to be tolerant. We have to recognize that Mexico and the United States in particular have shared economic policies and as a result of those economic policies, we have prompted much of the migration that comes into the United States. Immigrants in this country are currently not only picking the crops in the fields of California and elsewhere, but they are also contributing to our culture. They are holding public positions now. They are leaders in politics, in science, in the arts. So, you know, I really dispute the notion that somehow just because one side of the immigration debate says that immigrants are a drain in our society, when there is no argument on that as of now—it is hard to do an investigation on a population that lives in the shadows of our society.

MARGOT ADLER: Well I want to move on now to another topic. James, the measures being debated in Congress call for the construction of hundreds of miles of fencing along the U.S.-Mexico border, a veritable wall. We heard from another guest that Mexicans used to move pretty freely back and forth. They had come to the United States for a couple of years. They'd get some money to build a house in Mexico, they'd go back. And he argued that with the militarization of the border, paradoxically the stronger enforcement lead to a more permanent illegal immigration in this country. How do you answer that argument?

JAMES EDWARDS: Well, it's certainly true in some instances, however, as a rule, the fact is our enforcement never has been fully carried out. We established some enforcement measures subsequent from 1984, certainly the '86 act added some laws on the books. However, they have been half-measures and they have been watered down and they have not been fully funded or fully enforced. If we actually took not only a look at the border but also interior enforcement, and actually faithfully enforced the laws against employers as well as illegal workers, then you'd have to have a full-fledged, honest, faithful approach to doing that and making it work.

MARGOT ADLER: Do you believe there should be a veritable wall at the border?

JAMES EDWARDS: There should be a real barrier of some sort, a wall or fence or some combination thereof. But this talk of a virtual fence is a virtual joke. If you believe in a virtual fence, then why don't you just leave your car unlocked when you go to the store next time? Why don't you leave your house unlocked next time you go to run an errand.

MARGOT ADLER: Now, I want to let Christian get into this, but growing up in the 1960s, my image of a wall was the Berlin Wall. And so I have to ask why does America want to isolate itself and fence itself in? It seems the absolute antithesis to democracy.

JAMES EDWARDS: The difference is the Berlin Wall was constructed to keep people in to a terrible society. We are building a wall or would be building a barrier for the purpose of keeping people out.

MARGOT ADLER: Christian, your thought on the wall or a fence.

CHRISTIAN RAMIREZ: We can't be speaking out of both sides of our mouth. We can't be saying let's keep people out when we continuously are hiring people. Either we completely seal off our nation and become isolationists or we create an immigration program that makes sense, that is up to par with the realities that we're facing in the 21st century. Mexico, the United States and Canada signed the North American Free Trade Agreement over 10 years ago. In that agreement, there is no mention at all about labor movements, about immigration, about joint security measures. It's about time that we look at the real facts of globalization and the fact that not only should products and money be allowed to cross borders with no limits but we should also create a system that makes sense, that creates the possibility for a willing worker to cross at a port of entry with a document in hand and that worker be allowed to work in the United States if he or she is indeed qualified to do so. And putting up fences is simply a draconian measure for the 21st century.

MARGOT ADLER: James, I imagine you have a lot to say about that.

JAMES EDWARDS: It depends if your view is that the United States is a sovereign nation. Then you accept that we ought to be able to decide who gets in and who doesn't and on what grounds we admit people. And that's what, if in the light of the fact that there is a mass herd of people who are trying to come across unlawfully—now, if we were to do and take an attrition strategy like the House is trying to do and take border security, interior enforcement and employer sanctions all at once, and make it more difficult for people to get here and get a job, then you would see fewer people trying to come in. But until we do that one part nevertheless has to be having some physical barrier on the border.

MARGOT ADLER: According to one estimate it would cost \$3.2 million a mile to construct triple-layer fencing. If we're talking about hundreds of miles of fencing, isn't that a lot of money that could be spent elsewhere?

JAMES EDWARDS: There is one estimate I've seen of \$4 billion to do the entire border from the Gulf of Mexico to the Pacific. Four billion dollars is a pretty good deal on a high tech fence system if you consider the fact that we already—that would be a tax cut for the American people who currently fund about \$10 billion a year to illegal aliens taking part in federal assistance.

MARGOT ADLER: James, I'd like to ask you about the guest worker program. First of all, what do you think about it and how would it work?

JAMES EDWARDS: Well, number one, we already have several guest worker programs and they have a mixed result. As far as the general one being proposed, which is a way to legalize illegal aliens, I think it's a terrible idea and will only result in more illegal immigration, more permanent residents of illegal sort and people who will probably pose a problem because of the vast volume, a problem for us to assimilate.

MARGOT ADLER: Christian, do you think there are advantages or disadvantages to the idea of a guest worker program?

CHRISTIAN RAMIREZ: It's a band-aid solution. It doesn't address the fact that we already have 11 million undocumented workers in the country currently. A guest worker program addresses future flows of workers coming across the border. It really recognizes the fact that several industries in this nation are now more and more dependent on this work force.

MARGOT ADLER: James, the House bill makes illegal immigration a felony and people who help illegal immigrants could face criminal penalties. What actions, first of all, would become criminalized under this? For example, if I gave a bottle of water to someone trying to cross the border, should that be a crime?

JAMES EDWARDS: Well, what the House provision actually says as opposed to what certain people characterize it as saying is that those who further the coming or staying in this country, the harboring of people who are coming illegally and being part of a network that help them do it, when you knowingly are aware that someone is illegally present, then you would be subject to prosecution. And it has nothing to do with the giving of water, the giving of a sandwich in a soup line or something like that. It certainly doesn't remove the ability to give first-aid and all that sort of stuff. I mean, those are accepted under this. This is simply restoring what was long-standing law. It returns us to status quo ante with respect to the ability to get at the very traffickers who prey upon these poor people who won't do what Christian's describing, but promise one thing and get victimized as another thing.

MARGOT ADLER: Christian, do you agree with that characterization of what's in the bill?

CHRISTIAN RAMIREZ: The fact that the House will impose upon U.S. citizens to question anybody's legal status, in fact turns every single U.S. citizen into a virtual U.S. immigration officer. That's not the kind of society you want to live in. We want to live in a society in which we welcome the stranger, in a society in which we give a helping hand to those that need it without regard to what kind of document they have in their possession.

MARGOT ADLER: James, you want to answer that?

JAMES EDWARDS: Yes. To imply what he just implied is totally false. It is completely a lie. It is not in the House bill. What is in the House bill is the ability to go after traffickers and nothing to do with if you are simply doing humanitarian work. It would not affect anyone doing that at all.

MARGOT ADLER: Let's go on to another topic. It seems that everyone agrees there needs to be a better system for verifying documents and work eligibility, something like an employment card. What do you think about that idea, Christian?

CHRISTIAN RAMIREZ: That's exactly what we need. We need documents that make sure, that will provide information to our country of who is in the nation, who is working here, who isn't working here and where are those people working at. You know, we need to bring 11 million people out of the shadows of society. We've created this situation; we

promoted this situation. So providing a document to somebody that's in this nation working hard, trying to survive, is a step in the right direction.

MARGOT ADLER: James, what do you think about employment cards, verifying documents and so forth?

JAMES EDWARDS: What we have currently is the ability to check and see if an individual is eligible to work in this country. It's a system that is available to employers across the country and it goes to the root of the problem. That's the jobs magnet. That system is known as the basic pilot program. It's an electronic system where the information the employee already gives to the employer on the I-9 form—it's simply, you verify some of that information in an online check, a secure and cryptic system that protects people's privacy, and it simply gives the employer the assurance that before he invests a lot of money training this new employee, that that person's eligible to work here.

MARGOT ADLER: Christian, there have been massive protests about immigration recently. There was even talk about immigration activism being a new civil rights movement. Is there any reality to that?

CHRISTIAN RAMIREZ: I wouldn't characterize it as a new civil rights movement. I would say that it is a new chapter in our nation's history from a sector of our society, not only undocumented immigrants, but we have people from all walks of life marching in the streets last March, April and May. And we have to look at this as a way of raising the fact that something is wrong with our immigration policy, that there are millions of people who are being affected by this. And the folks that we saw in the streets of every single city of our nation are the faces of immigrants, are the folks who will be impacted by the decisions that our elected officials are making on Capitol Hill.

MARGOT ADLER: Thank you both for joining me. James Edwards is an adjunct fellow at the Hudson Institute, a think tank in Washington, D.C. He believes in tougher immigration policies. Christian Ramirez is an organizer for Project Voice, an immigrant rights initiative of the American Friends Service Committee.

MARGOT ADLER: Coming up, how illegal immigration plays out in Arizona, the state that has the most illegal immigrants crossing the borders. We'll talk with a volunteer who gives water and first-aid to people crossing the border and we'll hear from a member of the Minutemen who acts as a volunteer border patrol.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: In no way do we detain or chase on foot. We spot and report. That's strictly what we do.

MARGOT ADLER: Illegal immigration in the Arizona desert—don't go away.

MARGOT ADLER: This is Justice Talking. I'm Margot Adler. On today's show: illegal immigration. States on the border with Mexico feel the brunt of immigration from both legal and illegal immigrants. According to the U.S. border patrol, people crossing into Arizona from Mexico account for nearly one-third of the 1.5 million people caught illegally crossing the border last year. Marco Lopez is the executive director for the Arizona-Mexico Commission and is the policy advisor on Mexico and Latin America to Arizona Governor Janet Napolitano. I asked him how illegal immigration affected Nogales, Arizona, a border town of about 20,000. He used to be mayor there.

MARCO LOPEZ: Well, Nogales, Arizona, similar to other border communities, really sees the effects of illegal immigration in a secondary manner. You see some shoplifting in the stores. You see some home robberies where they get in, try to get food, try to get last minute things that they might need. But you don't see it as much anymore, simply because of the high presence of border patrol agents in those local border communities.

MARGOT ADLER: Now, you were born in Mexico and you immigrated to the United States and became a citizen at the age of 16. How has the experience of coming to America as an immigrant informed the work that you do?

MARCO LOPEZ: I think that not only has the experience of being born in Mexico, immigrating to the U.S., then receiving my citizenship—I think that that has influenced my stance, the way I see Mexico, the way I see people struggling for the opportunities that are available in the United States that are not available in Mexico. But more importantly than just having been born there I think that what has shaped more of my views and more of my beliefs on immigration, on border issues, has been the fact that I've lived along the border for the majority of my life. That really shapes the impression and the image that you have of a community, of a society that really sees the border very differently. The border is just a physical barrier that is there. However, culturally, socially and financially/economically we tend not to see the border as a barrier. We have families in Mexico. People in Mexico have family here and we go across that border on a daily basis. So we see it almost as a part of life. We don't see it as a barrier. We see it as something that is there by political policy but otherwise socially and culturally and economically we've learned to deal with it, we've learned to live with it, and really to accept it.

MARGOT ADLER: As the policy advisor to the Arizona governor on Latin America and Mexico, what do you think the United States immigration policy should be?

MARCO LOPEZ: Well, for many, many years, I have said that it makes much more sense to identify the individuals who are going around the ports of entry in a manner that would take those that are trying to come to further their lot in life economically, to find economic opportunities, to find work, get them out of the desert so that what you're left with in the desert are those that are either seeking to do our country harm, those that are seeking to bring across illicit drugs or other contraband. I think that that is the kind of common sense view that local border residents have. It does not make sense to enforce and to have border

patrol chasing people in the desert that want to come across and work, and quite frankly that are needed for the job market, the labor market in the United States.

MARGOT ADLER: So what do you think of all these proposals to fence off the entire border with Mexico?

MARCO LOPEZ: Well, I think that those that understand the dynamics, for instance in Arizona, Mexico being our largest trade partner, a trade relationship that totals over \$15.6 billion for those people involved in the 50,000 to 60,000 jobs that that creates annually here in Arizona, it makes no sense. It absolutely makes no sense simply because if it's a fence today, tomorrow they'll figure out how to go over or under it or find other means of getting into the United States. That simply is not a measure that will solve the illegal immigration problem.

MARGOT ADLER: Later on in our show we'll talk with an Arizona Minuteman who patrols the border and we'll hear from a doctor who provides medical aid to Mexicans who cross the border as part of the Samaritan Program. Are these groups of volunteers helping or hurting the situation at the border?

MARCO LOPEZ: Well, I think that for the most part, the help from the Minutemen, for instance, hasn't been—that the act of them being there patrolling isn't what's causing the impact. It is the act that has drawn a larger focus nationwide to what's going on that has provided the impact.

MARGOT ADLER: And the Samaritans?

MARCO LOPEZ: And the Samaritans I think are a different issue. I think that they draw attention to the humanitarian side of it, that the reality is that over 200 people die in the Arizona desert every year and that there's got to be a sense that human lives are actually at stake every day that we do not do our best to try to solve this problem.

MARGOT ADLER: Marco Lopez is the executive director for the Arizona-Mexico Commission and the policy advisor on Mexico and Latin America to Arizona Governor Janet Napolitano.

MARGOT ADLER: Along the Arizona border with Mexico, there are pads where illegal immigrants walk through the desert. They hope to make it into the United States without being caught by border patrol. Many people who cross the border aren't prepared for the day-long walk in the hot desert sun. Working along the border are volunteers who give food, water and first-aid to people. They call themselves the Samaritans. Dr. Bob Currans is a volunteer with the group. He talked to me from Tucson, Arizona. Tell us about your group. How many members do you have? Are you all volunteers?

BOB CURRANS: Our organization right now has about 15 to 20 active members who go out on, I would say, a frequent basis, for us that would be once or twice a week, driving in the desert and sometimes getting out and walking. And then another 20 or 30 people who aren't able to get out but do things for us like fundraise and maintain our supplies and keep us stocked with water to take out. We use a tremendous amount of water as you might guess.

MARGOT ADLER: And you're all volunteers, I gather.

BOB CURRANS: All volunteers, right.

MARGOT ADLER: And what's a day like?

BOB CURRANS: A typical day is probably not as exciting as one might hope or might expect. Usually a group of two or three of us will go out in a vehicle and we'll go out to areas primarily to the west and south of Tucson where most of the border crossing takes place and drive along roads that either intersect trails that people might use going from south to north, coming into the United States or paralleling some of those same trails. The trails that people use are pretty well established.

MARGOT ADLER: And how often do you come across people?

BOB CURRANS: I would say almost on a daily basis, but the people we come across are usually in any one of three categories. They may be traveling and want to continue and accept food or water, whatever the case may be, but more and more we encounter people who have already been apprehended and who are waiting for Border Patrol or Immigration Service buses to carry them into Tucson to be processed. Then they have such high numbers and often long waits that they might be out in the desert four to six hours after they've been apprehended. And then the final group is of people who have made it to a certain point, say 20 or 30 miles north of the border. By then they're so exhausted and tired that basically they ask us to notify the Border Patrol to come and get them and take them back.

MARGOT ADLER: Now, some people might argue that your work encourages undocumented immigrants to cross the border. How do you respond to that?

BOB CURRANS: Well, the people that would tell you that are people that don't understand either the economic or the social situation in Mexico right now, the lack of jobs, the inability to market one's own agricultural crops in competition with things that are actually growing in the United States and shipped down to Mexico duty-free. You talk to these people, the vast majority of them, and they will tell you what the survival issues are.

MARGOT ADLER: Now last year two of your members were arrested. Tell us about that.

BOB CURRANS: That occurred in a situation where two members encountered three rather ill men about 18 miles north of the border, fairly late on a Saturday, I believe it was, and

determined that they needed transport to Tucson for further medical care as opposed to simply food, water and first-aid. They were unable to get a hold of anyone—Border Patrol, EMS, whatever—to transport these people and they were basically bringing them to Tucson to get that medical aid and they were stopped about half way. Prior to that, there was sort of a tacit agreement between us and the Border Patrol because we do communicate with them regularly about a situation like that, you know, that would not be interpreted as transporting or aiding or abetting or any of the other terms that are used. Whatever happened on that day, we're not sure, but they decided to make a case of it so they arrested the two people and the legal process is still kind of grinding on for both of them.

MARGOT ADLER: And has your relationship with the Border Patrol changed as result of those arrests?

BOB CURRANS: I think in terms of our actions, yes. We would be very hesitant under any circumstances to have someone in one of our vehicles short of a true life or death emergency where they had to be transported.

MARGOT ADLER: What got you involved in this issue?

BOB CURRANS: I've been in Tucson for 25 years. My first four years in medicine was on the reservation. And even back 25 years ago, people were crossing through the reservation with some regularity, and the numbers grew, but I think the big issue for all of us that started this organization and are currently working in it for the last six years—there have been increasing numbers of people being found dead in the desert. There again, the ones that are found are maybe half of the people that actually died. So I think that was kind of the triggering mechanism, that it went from a kind of an observable social phenomena, because there wasn't a lot of tragedy or drama associated with it, to a real tragic situation.

MARGOT ADLER: Dr. Currans is a volunteer with the Samaritans on the Mexican border.

MARGOT ADLER: There are other volunteers on the U.S. border with Mexico who work to catch illegal immigrants who are trying to enter the country. Sitting in lawn chairs and armed with walkie talkies and cell phones, they keep watch on people crossing the border and report their sightings to the Border Patrol. Stacey O'Connell is Arizona's state director of the Minutemen Civil Defense Corps, a volunteer group that patrols the U.S. border looking for illegal immigrants. Tell us about your group. How many members do you have? What do you do?

STACEY O'CONNELL: Well, the Minutemen Civil Defense Corps nationwide has just over 7,000 volunteer members. In my chapter, the Arizona State Chapter, we're just over 1,000. You know, we're all volunteers and we all volunteer in different ways.

MARGOT ADLER: And what got you involved in this issue?

STACEY O'CONNELL: Wow, you know, I've been involved with this issue one way or the other since I was in 8th grade. Illegal immigration has affected my life as a younger child where I went to school with many immigrant families in my neighborhood and befriended many, many immigrant families and just saw how they were raised, learned about their plight coming from Mexico, and this was back in the early 80s. I saw how it affected my family financially when my father, his vehicle was hit by an illegal alien vehicle who, somebody who was not insured, you know, it put us out monetarily because of the medical bills. We had no vehicle for a few months. And as I've become an older adult and living my daily life here in Arizona, you just see it constantly on a daily basis, different industries losing citizen workers to what we call, refer to as illegal aliens.

MARGOT ADLER: Now, we do have a U.S. Border Patrol. So the obvious question comes up, why don't you leave this work to the professionals?

STACEY O'CONNELL: Because the work is not being completed by the professionals and it's not necessarily their fault. The boots on the ground, these guys are doing everything they can with the resources they have. They are not completing the job. You know, we've got 4,000 or 5,000 illegal aliens coming across our southern border every single day and they cannot apprehend every one of them. So when we talk about doing the job our government won't do, it's not doing the job that our Border Patrol won't do because they're doing a good job and they're having a good effect, not a great effect. So we're doing the job that our elected officials refuse to do.

MARGOT ADLER: Now suppose you come across a group of illegal immigrants. What do you do?

STACEY O'CONNELL: What do we do?

MARGOT ADLER: Uh-huh.

STACEY O'CONNELL: We pick up our radios, we pick up our cell phones and we call our communications center, who then in turn calls the dispatch officer at Border Patrol, tells the Border Patrol our post number, our location, tell them what we see, how many, what direction they appear to be traveling. Let them know if there are any children that appear to be in the group and then we hang up the phone and wait for Border Patrol to arrive. In no way do we detain or chase on foot. We spot and report. That's strictly what we do.

MARGOT ADLER: And have you, yourself come across many illegal immigrants coming into the country in this situation?

STACEY O'CONNELL: Oh, absolutely, just countless of times and countless number of illegal aliens that I've spotted. One of the sad things that always sticks in my mind is the children that are coming across the border with their families. And we're not talking about just teenagers, but we're talking about toddlers, infants, even older children, eight, 10 years old that are traveling through the desert three or four days at a time. We come across these

families, they're dehydrated, they have dysentery, they are hungry. You know, Margot, I don't know if you're a mother but –

MARGOT ADLER: I am actually.

STACEY O'CONNELL: I have some children and if I did that with my children, that would, the American government would call that child abuse.

MARGOT ADLER: In a piece of literature from your organization, you say to people who've come to your website "You are reading this because you believe that you can actively participate in one of the most important socially responsible and peaceful movements for justice since the civil rights movement of the 1960s." That's pretty intense language.

STACEY O'CONNELL: It is, and that's exactly how we feel. You know, protecting our border, for us it's a matter of national security, border security—9-11, five years ago, grave affect on our nation, 3,000 people dead in one location because of the acts of a very few people. Until the government can tell us which one of these illegal aliens is carrying a nuclear bomb or a bottle of Anthrax, I'm going to be on that border protecting it.

MARGOT ADLER: Stacey O'Connell is Arizona's state director of the Minutemen Civil Defense Corps.

MARGOT ADLER: Tell us what you think about immigration. What should our country's policies be? You can share your thoughts on our website, justicetalking.org. While there, you can also listen to past shows or sign up to podcast our show. Thanks for joining me. I hope you'll tune in next week. I'm Margot Adler.
