

# A house divided on immigrants

With mounting public pressure to do something, anything, about the country's porous southern border, President Bush this week is wading knee deep into the region's risky political currents of illegal immigration.

His stops in Tucson, Ariz., yesterday and El Paso, Texas, this morning were scheduled to spotlight the importance of border security while also touting his guest-worker proposal. But a campaign visit to Denver later today quietly epitomizes the rift in his own party over the immigration issues.

Bush is appearing at a luncheon for Congresswoman Marilyn Musgrave. The president and Rep. Musgrave see eye-to-eye on most issues, but she favors a tougher approach to immigration reform.

The president's guest-worker proposal would allow illegals already in the United States to register and work for up to six years before returning to their home countries. He says it would help U.S. enforcement of the border because it brings illegals "out of the shadows." But opponents, including Musgrave and fellow Colorado Rep. Tom Tancredo, think it equates to an amnesty and unfairly rewards those who broke the law to get here. They are among many in the Republican conservative base who want tougher policies, including beefing up military patrols of the border.

The president continues to walk a kinder, gentler line on immigration, seeking to satisfy business owners who don't want anything to jeopardize a low-cost supply of ready labor. At the same time, many party leaders want Bush to promote policies that will help the GOP woo Hispanic voters.

Those impulses don't deter the likes of Musgrave and Tancredo. Just last week, Musgrave petitioned House leadership to enact some form of immigration reform. In her letter to Speaker Dennis Hastert, Musgrave called for building more fences in high-traffic areas along the border while increasing aerial surveillance and ground sensor technologies, more border patrol agents, the listing of deported illegals on the National Crime Information Center system and stiffer penalties for companies that hire illegals. She touched a particularly volatile chord in seeking the end of "automatic citizenship" policies, meaning at least one parent must be a legal citizen or resident for a couple's U.S.-born children to be citizens. And she made plain her opposition to amnesty.

This country definitely needs a meaningful debate on immigration reform. We don't know if Musgrave plans to press her case with the president today, but Republicans seem far from any consensus.