

*C-ville Weekly, May 7-13*

# Quick, close the door!

## Goode takes a hard line on Virginia's 100,000 illegal immigrants—again

Immigration policy has returned to the front of the national political discourse. Having become entwined with the debate over national security in the wake of 9/11, immigration measures have swung pivotal legislative fights. And on the general issue of what to do about the country's large and growing undocumented population—estimated at around 10 million—President Bush's decision to steer toward somewhere in the middle ground with his "guest worker" proposal has revealed deep fissures in the Republican Party.

Virgil Goode, Charlottesville's Congressional representative, has made restricting immigration a pillar of his political career. "Illegal immigrants take jobs from our citizens. I'm working to stop illegal immigration and secure America's borders," he proclaims on his campaign website. Goode regularly gets perfect marks for his voting record from anti-immigration advocacy groups. He has co-sponsored bills cutting back legal immigration and a resolution to amend the Constitution to restrict citizenship from children born in the United States whose parents are not legal residents.

When Bush announced in January 2004 his proposal to grant renewable, three-year "guest worker" status to illegal immigrants, Goode was a visible member of the opposition. "It's a glide path to a green card and citizenship," Goode tells C-VILLE. "It encourages persons who are here illegally to get a reward... That's the wrong message to be sending persons. If you're here illegally, the only way you can come into the United States is go back and get in line with everyone else. Or if you're in a guest worker program, you got to go back to your home country and apply in that country for a guest worker program."

Goode describes his position as "no amnesty for illegals, period."

"There's a general recognition by people on both sides of the immigration debate that there's an urgent need for comprehensive immigration reform," says Tim Freilich, managing attorney with the Virginia Justice Center for Farm and Immigrant Workers. "You have people who tend to favor enforcement over providing a more balanced system that ensures there is a path to legalization for immigrants, rather than just a boundless supply of labor for employers."

Early last month Senators John McCain, an Arizona Republican, and Edward Kennedy, a Massachusetts Democrat, introduced legislation in line with Bush's temporary work-permit idea and which created a path to permanent residency and citizenship.

In Virginia, the undocumented population has been estimated in excess of 100,000. The Commonwealth ranked 25th between 1990 and 2000 out of the 50 states and the District of Columbia in terms of the growth of the percentage of its population made up by foreign-born people.

Some Republicans have espoused the cause of "millions of hard-working men and women condemned to fear and insecurity in a massive, undocumented economy," as Bush has put it, a position that melds with commercial interests dependent on immigrant labor and the party's desire to court rapidly growing numbers of Hispanic voters. The crosscurrents between them and immigration hardliners have produced a welter of dueling legislative initiatives.

Republicans stumbled badly late last year after sweeping to victory with a new lease on the presidency and improved congressional majorities when dramatic intelligence reforms—modeled on recommendations from the September 11 commission and favored by Bush—were held up by dissident Republican leaders. In part, objections arose because measures tightening controls against illegal immigrants had been dropped from the package. This year, federal provisions requiring confirmation of legal residency for state driver's licenses were successfully attached to the \$82 billion Iraq spending bill that passed in May.

Proponents of the McCain bill expect a tough fight. Of the varying policy prescriptions Goode says, "It would be difficult for me to say that any has a consensus majority." But Freilich identifies a baseline curb against the toughest anti-immigration proposals that points toward accommodation. "We have an immigration policy right now that doesn't reflect the economic realities in Virginia or the rest of the United States," he says. "We are largely dependent on undocumented workers who perform the toughest and lowest paid jobs in the economy."—*Harry Terris*