

**P**lace yourself in an illegal immigrant's tattered shoes for awhile. Take a walk in them and imagine that you're living and working in this country. How does it feel?

I bet you're scared. I bet you're lonely, too. And I bet you're wondering where your life will lead you.

Truth is, you can't put yourself in an illegal immigrant's shoes. As much as you would like to empathize with him, you have no idea what he's going through.

If you employ Mexicans and Hispanics on your maintenance crew, you've probably been watching the immigration debate with a keen interest. There are roughly 12 million illegal immigrants, about half of them Mexicans, believed to be living and working in the United States. No doubt some of them are working on golf course maintenance crews. I wonder how many superintendents realize they're employing illegal immigrants?

If they don't know, they had better find out. The GOP-led House of Representatives has already passed a bill that would not only make it a felony to be an illegal immigrant, but make it a felony to offer aid to an illegal immigrant. Pretty harsh, huh?

Consider this bill for a moment, though, and imagine that it's the law. Would you turn in a hard-working Mexican, who also happened to be an illegal immigrant, to save your own behind?

This bill puts the onus on employers to come clean — or else. Must our government leaders resort to such a threatening means?

There's no doubt our country is in need of immigration reform. Improvements must be made to better detect who's coming into the country and why. But our lawmakers must remember this is also a human-rights issue, not just a numbers issue. Illegal immigrants may not wear silk ties, but many of them bear purposeful souls.

Most of these illegal immigrants come to America to escape poverty and are in search for better lives. When I say better, I don't mean riches. These people immigrate to the United

## Walking With Illegal Immigrants

BY LARRY AYLWARD



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States to make a meager \$8 an hour. But that's a much more livable wage than the \$2 an hour they would make in their home countries.

In the last several years, many golf course superintendents have hired immigrants, mostly from Mexico and other Hispanic countries, to work on their maintenance crews. Many superintendents work through the nation's H-2B visa program to secure documented seasonal workers.

I've never met a superintendent who didn't rave about Mexican and Hispanic employees' work ethics. I've also heard many superintendents say they are thankful for Mexican and Hispanic workers because they're willing to do jobs that many Americans aren't — like get up at 5 a.m. on Saturday and go rake bunkers and whack weeds for several hours.

The golf course maintenance industry owes these people its support. This is no time for the industry to turn its back on them.

Again, the nation needs to do something to get a handle on illegal immigration. We need to improve security at our borders as a safety precaution from terrorism. But let's not criminalize all of the the illegal immigrants who came here to escape poverty in the process. Let's give them a chance at legalization while they're here. They came here out of hope. Let's not take that away from them.

So don't support the insensitive bill passed by the House. Please support a mandate that is more compassionate. Let's let the illegal immigrants know that we understand their plight and want to assist them.

We may not be able to walk a mile in their shoes, but we can sure walk with them.

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