

Border Battleground – Day Four

Brazilians jumping through legal loophole to penetrate border

By SERGIO CHAPA
The Brownsville Herald

MEXICO CITY, August 17, 2005 – The ongoing war against terrorism may prompt Mexican authorities to close a 3-year-old loophole that has allowed thousands of Brazilians to illegally enter the United States.

U.S. Ambassador to Mexico Tony Garza said that both the Mexican and Brazilian governments understand American concerns that terrorists could use illegal immigration to enter the United States.



In a July 26 interview with The Brownsville Herald, Garza said Mexico and Brazil do not want to unfairly limit the movements of their people, but at the same time they do not want to be used as a platform for terrorists.

“Nobody wants to be the jumping off point to do harm,” he said.

Although officials from the National Migration Institute (INAMI) declined to comment on the issue, Garza said concerns over illegal immigration and terrorism could prompt Mexico to change a 3-year-old law that allows Brazilians to enter Mexico without a passport or visa.

U.S. Border Patrol figures show that Mexico’s policy spurred an almost immediate wave of illegal immigration as Brazilians used Mexico as a springboard to enter the United States.

According to statistics, illegal Brazilian immigrants increased from 1,045 people in fiscal year 2003 to more than 21,456 in first 10 months of fiscal year 2005.

Figures show that more than 75 percent of the immigrants were caught in the Rio Grande Valley and South Texas.

Garza said the high levels of illegal immigration strain law enforcement and anti-terrorism activities on both sides of the border.

“If you look at terrorist acts around the world, they are becoming less predictable,” the Brownsville-born ambassador said. “In the case of Mexico, if you were to disrupt some aspect of the Mexican economy to any significant degree, it would have an impact in the United States.”

Although Brazil is listed as an ally in the war against terrorism, concerns over the integrity of their immigration documents and large numbers of Brazilians overstaying tourist visas prompted American officials to require visas for the South American nation in 2001.

“At the heart of a lot of the immigration debate is not an unwillingness to have more immigrants, it’s a desire to have order and respect for our laws,” Garza said.

Garza said high-levels of approved visas in Mexico and other nations show that Americans are willing to make room for legal immigrants and visitors.

Figures from the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City show that American officials approved up to 75 percent out of more than 1 million applications.

The state department's offices in Mexico City, Guadalajara and Monterrey are reported to be among three of the top five visa-issuing posts in the world.

"One of its objectives is to have some sense of order to the movement of peoples so that you know when, for how long and ideally why people are moving to the United States," Garza said of visa regulations.

schapa@brownsvilleherald.com