

# Anti-immigrant mob shameless

**R**ep. Tom Tancredo of Colorado should remember an old adage: People who let illegal immigrants work on their houses shouldn't throw tantrums about illegal immigration.

The two-term Republican member of Congress long ago discovered a market of voters hungry for red meat on immigration. He has served it up in slabs.

One minute, he suggests putting the military on the U.S.-Mexico border. The next minute, he blasts the leader of his own party — President Bush — for supposedly weakening national security with an "open-door" immigration policy.

Tancredo has made these outlandish statements and others from his perch as chairman of the Congressional Immigration Reform Caucus. He and his cohort in the caucus are marked by their conviction that illegal immigrants are the ruin of the country. Many held these beliefs long before 19 terrorists — nearly all of whom entered the U.S. legally — crashed airplanes into the World Trade Center, the Pentagon and a Pennsylvania field.

As a public figure with a flair for exploiting an issue that inflames so many Americans, one would think Tancredo would be extra careful to avoid the appearance of hypocrisy and insincerity.

Not so.

Consider his actions concerning an 18-year-old Denver-area high school student named Jesus Apodaca. Tancredo wants to mark the young man's academic achievements and hard work in pursuit of the American dream by having the honor student and his family deported. You see, even though the Apodacas have lived in the U.S. for several years, working, paying taxes and sending their children to school, they entered illegally.



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The hypocrisy comes with the revelation that Tancredo may have first-hand experience with illegal immigrant labor. He hired a drywall company to remodel his home, and some of the laborers who did the job allegedly are here illegally.

Tancredo insists he did nothing wrong and that it is "not my job" to ask people if they are here illegally. Nor, said the congressman's spokeswoman, is it the job of the company or other employers to determine if people they hire are here illegally.

Not my job. Not their job. With all those jobs — and millions of others of the dirty and low-paying variety — going unfilled in America, it is no wonder there is such demand for illegal immigrant labor.

The fuss has its roots in Jesus Apodaca's admittance to the University of Colorado. Since he is undocumented, he was told he would have to pay out-of-state tuition to the tune of more than \$7,000 a year. After *The Denver Post* picked up on the story, an anonymous donor pledged to cover the tuition.

That made Tancredo mad. So he did what congressmen do when they get steamed: He turned up the heat on some poor bureaucrat — the director of the regional office for the Immigration and Naturalization Service.

*The Post* reported that Tancredo asked the INS that the Apodaca family be deported. Tancredo denies that,

saying he simply asked why the INS hadn't at least written a letter asking the family to come in for a chat.

There is the insincerity. Such a letter would kick off deportation proceedings, and Tancredo knows it. Besides, this is no ordinary concerned citizen calling, but a member of the House of Representatives. When Congress speaks, the INS listens. During a speech on the House floor, Tancredo acknowledged as much when he said he realized that his "ability to get the director on the phone" made his request hard to ignore.

I become ill at the thought that Tancredo has a point. The family is here illegally, and they could have spared themselves this grief had they made the effort to become citizens. Besides, the law doesn't make exceptions for honor students or their families.

Where he loses me is in the cowardly way that Mr. Law & Order has ducked responsibility for hiring a company without making sure it was not using illegal immigrant labor. Even Dan Stein, executive director of the right-leaning Federation for American Immigration Reform, told *The Post* that Tancredo "probably should have done that."

The fact that the congressman didn't — and that even now he shows no remorse — illustrates the problem with the anti-illegal immigration mob. They always blast the immigrant, and save their mercy for the employer who exploits them and the consumers who benefit.

Now the Apodacas are hiding in fear, while Tom Tancredo should be hiding in shame.

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