

**NATIONAL ACADEMY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
STANDING PANEL ON SOCIAL EQUITY IN GOVERNANCE
PANEL MEETING: FRIDAY, APRIL 26, 2006**

**IMMIGRATION AND EQUITY: A DIALOG TO HELP SHAPE THE ISSUES OF THIS
IMPORTANT CHALLENGE**

Background

On Friday, April 14, 2006, the Standing Panel on Social Equity in Governance at the National Academy of Public Administration hosted a meeting on “Immigration and Equity: A Dialogue to Help Shape the Issues of this Important Challenge”. The meeting was attended by Members (Academy Fellows) and Associate Members of the panel and featured presentations by Dr. William Spriggs, Chair of the Economics Department, Howard University; and Dr. Costis Torgas, Fellow of the Academy, Researcher and Adjunct Faculty, George Washington University. The following pages summarize the key points of their presentation.

Perspectives on the Immigration Debate

Dr. Spriggs’ presentation focused on the different facets of the current debate on immigration in the United States, as well as the economic impact of immigration. He made the following key points:

- 1 In discussing issues of equity, it is important to examine economics. With regards to immigration, there isn’t yet consensus on the economic impact of immigration
- 2 The political reality of the immigration debate is that it centers primarily on Mexicans, and is rarely linked to the general economic impact of immigration. The debate’s emphasis on Mexican immigration makes it difficult to differentiate between arguments motivated by xenophobia, racism or political will, all of which have implications for social equity.
- 3 The discussion on immigration has not delved deeply enough into four specific areas that are crucial for equity considerations:
 - a) The debate has not addressed social equity as an essential bi-product of immigration. On an international level, for instance, the immigration discussion has not examined the United States’ policies towards its neighbors and the consequent social equity implications for the hemisphere. Why, for example, does the United States have stricter immigration policies for Haiti than it does for Mexico? Both are neighbors of the United States; but while Mexico is relatively wealthy Draft 06.22.06

(GDP per capita of over \$10, 000), Haiti is significantly poor (GDP per capita of \$1, 600)

- b) To change the dynamics of immigration, it is necessary to include a discussion of Mexican labor standards. For instance, even though the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was drafted to improve trade between countries in North America, it deals primarily with investment for United States companies. The agreement leaves in place significant barriers to labor mobility and labor market integration.
- c) Immigration cannot be considered solely as a United States problem. Mexican policies must also be put on the table. Currently it appears that Mexico gets all the benefits of its policies. Remittances to Mexico, for example, have increased significantly as the United States economy has prospered. They account for about 2.5% of GDP, which is more than Mexico gets from oil or tourism. There has to be far more discussion on the role of remittances as a national source of income and its true labor interpretation.
- d) The impact of immigration is very hard to measure on a local level because it is a national level phenomenon. On the local level, native born workers may migrate out in the face of foreign immigration. This movement of people can cause national changes in wages that balance out, and make it appear that immigration had no measurable effect. As with any policy, the immigration reforms will leave people behind, who may be harmed by an influx of immigrants, but who cannot move to other labor markets where they might benefit.
- e) The new wave of immigration has occurred in the post-Civil Rights era, where the black-white racial hierarchy had already been challenged. The result has been an argument for the re-ordering of America's old racial hierarchy and the unattended social equity issues of that hierarchy, while creating new social equity issues with the new hierarchy such as noted in items (c), (d) and (f) and in item 2; however, this has left in place many of the de facto barriers of the old hierarchy; this could have significant social equity implications.
- f) In the low wage market there is a lack of transparency. The lack of transparency allows employers to segment the market and act like "monopsonists"¹ on the local level. By relying heavily on "word-of-mouth" and employee referrals, low wage employers limit access to their jobs and segment the labor market. In part they achieve this by segmenting based on racial groups, and by gender, and playing off racial isolation—particularly African-Americans who face high levels of residential segregation and so often are not connected to certain jobs or the job market.

A "monopsony" market is an economic model describing a situation where there is only one employer of a specific type of labor, resulting in wages that are lower and employment levels that are less than what would be expected in pure competition.

Dr. Costis Toregas discussed the different ways that states and localities have dealt with immigration, and examined the role of public administrators in becoming involved in the debate to educate the public and ensure positive outcomes. He made the following observations:

1 At the local level the immigration discussion is just being understood; however, city councils and county commissions deal with its impacts daily

2 There are several examples of how social equity plays out in immigration. For example, undocumented immigrants are often victims of robbery and other forms of crime because they are unable to file complaints with security authorities given their illegal status. In North Carolina, children of undocumented immigrants are allowed to attend school for free until they reach 12th grade. At that level they can no longer continue their education and could be deported back to their home countries.

3 Even though several states have established offices and commissions to address the challenges presented by illegal immigration, there is no coherence between the agendas and strategies of these groups.

4 There is very little work being done on the national, state and local level to assist immigrants and effectively address the challenges immigration poses.

5 The role of the Public Administrator then is to complement the work of federal agencies and present broader perspectives that will promote the development of immigration policies that are inclusive. This requires active engagement of city managers and county officials at the local level.

6 The Academy's Standing Panel on Social Equity in Governance needs to start the national dialogue on these problems – whether by writing an article in a journal or by organizing a larger meeting and inviting critical stakeholders. Equity should be on the table in these immigration discussions and the Academy could help to dissect some of the issues that are being ignored in the debate.