

The 21st century immigrant story

Illegal immigrants have become a fixed and growing part of America — living, working, and raising families in the shadows

TRANSCRIPT

By Tom Brokaw

Correspondent

Updated: 1:23 a.m. CT Dec 27, 2006

ROARKING FORK VALLEY, COLO. - The Roaring Fork Valley of Colorado is home of Aspen and Snowmass, the playground, as they say, of the rich and the famous. This is also the home of working class and middle class communities.

There are boom times here—a lot of new construction, and a rapidly expanding population. But there's something else going on: A passionate debate about the waves of illegal immigrants, undocumented workers pouring across the border from Mexico, Central and South America to find a job and a home here.

The debate is about the economic realities, the social consequences, and the political controversies. It's also about whether these new immigrants should be allowed to stay in the this immigrant nation.

One Saturday night in March, the Garfield county police just stopped a van heading east on I-70, Colorado's major interstate.

Female officer: They have so much weight, the muffler's dragging on the pavement.

The reason the muffler was dragging quickly becomes clear: Eleven men, none of whom speak English, slowly emerge from a van that normally seats eight.

Gas receipts told them this van had been to the border of Mexico and back. It even had a makeshift bathroom, cigarettes, oil, and Pepsi, and a gallon jug.

A scene such as this has become routine in Colorado—and it's become a popular image of illegal immigration across America.

But it's only a small part of the story we found in the Roaring Fork Valley of Colorado, a pristine stretch between Aspen and Vail.

For eight months, NBC News explored the popular myths and the truths about illegal immigration.

The real story is of a booming economy dependent on thousands of illegal workers.

That illegal community is thriving and enjoying the benefits of what America has to offer—but only by breaking the law— whether it's purchasing medicine on the black market or buying a fake driver's license, and it all seems to go on out in the open.

Mark Gould owns Gould Construction company in Glenwood Springs.

It's first in and first out at a construction site, laying sewer systems, sidewalks, and foundations for homes, and schools, and waste-water treatment plants.

Mark Gould, owner Gould Construction company: Americans don't want this work.

The back-breaking and dirty work is done by the 25 Hispanic workers on Gould's staff of 125.

Mark Gould: These are tough jobs. These people work their butts off.

In March, at the beginning of the Colorado building season, dozens of men, most of them Hispanic, gathered in the lobby of Gould Construction.

Brett Gould, in charge of hiring: I've gotta have you know real documents you know. They need to be real. Otherwise we can't even go there.

Brett Gould, Mark's brother who's in charge of hiring, struggled to find and keep reliable labor without breaking the law by knowingly hiring illegal immigrants.

Tom Brokaw, NBC News: They present their papers to you?**Brett Gould:** Yes, absolutely.**Brokaw:** To say they're legal?**Brett Gould:** Yes.**Brokaw:** And how much confidence do you have in those papers?**Brett Gould:** Well, to me they appear legal. There are some that I've run across that—obviously they're fake. Yeah, you could see that they've done something. They've doctored up the picture. **Brokaw:** How much of a detective do you think you have to be at that first stop when determining the authenticity of the papers?**Brett Gould:** If it looks obviously wrong, I'll just say, "We can't accept these." I've seen permanent resident cards and this one is not even close.

Brett examines the identification presented: Social Security cards, permanent resident cards, but he's not required to be a document expert.

Sometimes, the workers just don't give up. Even if they've been turned away, they'll come back with any documentation they can get their hands on.

Brett Gould: I need you know either a resident alien card or a permanent resident card. Do you have that?

This man tries to use a Mexican voter registration card and a Social Security card, crudely forged.

Brett Gould: No, I can't take this. The Social Security card had a tape over it with his name written in pen and I mean that is definitely a no-no.

Mark Gould: We don't have enough unskilled workers in the state of Colorado.

Brokaw: But there's nothing wrong with society advancing to a stage where it's no longer necessary to have a good pair of boots and a strong back and a good pair of hands at the same time.

Mark Gould: Yeah, that's the deal. I mean, right now we have every kid coming out of school feels they're entitled to a job other than digging a ditch for Gould construction. And there's nothing wrong with that. I mean I grew up digging ditches, but the bottom line is we all want better for our children than we had. And at the moment, there are enough skilled positions to where kids don't have to go in the unskilled field.

Brokaw: And the moral dilemma for you is that, as a citizen, you do want to play by the rules. And you're trying to play by the rules. But as a businessman, you have a need to fill. So there's the real possibility that you've got some illegals on your payroll who are giving you the documents that seem to be right. Is that a fair summary?

Mark Gould: I would say that we have to make the assumption that we have followed the law and that there is the possibility that there are people in the system.

In mid-March, two men sat before Brett. They were both applying for entry-level jobs— that means digging ditches.

Brett Gould: Okay, I need your Social Security number right here.

Both had Social Security cards that to Brett Gould looked real.

Trinidad, who likes to be called Trino, is from Mexico.

Brett Gould: Sign and date here.

And Ray is American. Both were hired that day by Gould Construction for 14 dollars an hour—more than double the minimum wage, with full benefits.

Even though Brett checked all the identification, a permanent resident card and a Social Security card, could he be sure that Trinidad was a legal worker?

In March, Trino began working for Gould Construction — digging ditches for affordable housing in Aspen. The company didn't know it, but Trino is an illegal immigrant.

Trino, illegal immigrant: My life has a change here, a big change. I just go to work and go back to my house. Sleep.

Although Trino admits breaking the law by crossing the border and using false documents to get hired, he says he couldn't find a decent job in Mexico and didn't think he had a chance of getting one of the 5,000 visas available to unskilled workers.

Tom Brokaw, NBC News: How much did it cost you to get here?**Trino:** Cost me like \$1,500. If you're going to go close to the border then you can just pay \$800. If you're going to go up to Montana, somewhere New York, **Brokaw:** They charge you more.**Trino:** They charge you more like three thousand.**Brokaw:** Do you send money home? **Trino:** Yeah.**Brokaw:** How much? **Trino:** Like 300, 200 not that much.**Brokaw:** How much do you make a week?**Trino:** I make like 800, or after taxes, I take like 600.

To save money, Trino shares the \$1,800 rent with his three brothers, other relatives and friends.

Brokaw: How many have a Social Security number?**Brothers:** No, No. (laugh)

18 immigrants in all live in this 4-bedroom home which is zoned for a single family, but he and his brothers defend this living arrangement as just extended family.

Geronimo: We are just a family. Like uncles, you know, sons and cousins.

Diana, who is two, is the only American citizen in the home since she was born here. Her mother, Maribel paid \$750 dollars at the local clinic for pre-natal care, but nothing at the hospital where she gave birth.

Besides child birth, this family tries to avoid any trip to a clinic or to the hospital.

When the entire group got sick with a stomach flu, Trino's brother Jesus bought penicillin without a prescription at a local meat market. That's a common practice in Mexico, but it is against the law in the United States. Then he nervously estimated the injection dosage for everyone including his 2-year-old niece.

Jesus: I feel nervous you know cause you look at her little cheek and here and oh no! I don't want to hit the bone do something.

Everyone chips in for food and Maribel shops and cooks for the men. She also cuts everyone's hair.

Brokaw: In America, we say "you pool your resources." Everybody contributes.**Trino:** Yeah.

They also believe they contribute their fair share to the State and U.S. government. Trino's federal and state taxes are withheld by Gould Construction.

Trino: They take my taxes from my check and they take me. Everything I go buy—if I buy a candy, a little candy, [I] pay taxes for it. How do you say “I don’t pay taxes”? **Jesus:** See I did my taxes.

Although Trino doesn’t file his income taxes, his brother Jesus did - believing it would help his chances of becoming an American citizen.

Jesus: Those guys told me about - about if you do that taxes, those guys more easy to get papers for working.

So like, millions of other illegal immigrants nationwide, he filed income taxes under a special number given to him by the IRS.

In fact, over the last decade, it’s estimated illegal immigrants have paid over 50 billion dollars to Social Security—money many of them are never likely to see.

Although many Americans find it offensive that these immigrants live so cheaply in such crowded conditions, Vanessa, the 6-year-old who lives in this house with her uncle Trino, doesn’t seem to mind.

Vanessa: We just have one bedroom. But we sleep down at the down. And down at the floor and my mom sleeps with my dad up. **Brokaw:** So you sleep in the same room as your mom and dad? **Vanessa:** (nods) **Brokaw:** And you sleep on the floor? **Vanessa:** (nods)

Vanessa attends kindergarten at Crystal River Elementary School.

The school age population including Hispanics is exploding at such a rate that the school district hired Gould Construction to help expand the elementary and high school.

Even though the whole community is half Hispanic, the Carbondale schools are 80 per cent Hispanic.

Brokaw: Is it fair for the property owners in this valley to be paying the tab for a lot of Hispanic kids, many of whom probably have parents who came here illegally? **Mark Gould:** Well I gotta start with the fact that we need—we need an economy that works here. And the only way to have economy that works is to have employees. And so, are the landowners getting value from their land because we have a prosperous economy? And if you make that nexus, then you’d have to say they’re getting benefit from the fact that we have a prosperous economy and they’re able to pay their taxes.

Vanessa’s family pays \$1,800 a year in property taxes—that is a small portion of what the state pays to educate her which is more than \$5,000 a year.

All the children in Vanessa's class are Hispanic except for two Anglo children. While she learns English, White children such as Spencer Ochko study Spanish.

Kim Ochko, resident: You know, Spencer knows a lot more Spanish than I do at this point. (chuckle) He can count to 40. He can do all of these things. And I think it's wonderful. But at the same time I have fears. You know, he's very young, in kindergarten. And I have fears that perhaps, you know, going into first grade when they kind of get a little more serious, that perhaps the time that should be spent on his learning may be diverted to those students that maybe only speak Spanish.

Spencer's mother, Kim Ochko, is conflicted because she knows first-hand how valuable the immigrant workers are to the local economy — she's a vice-president at Gould Construction.

Brokaw: You've lived around here for a long time. **Ochko:** Yes. **Brokaw:** You like what's happening? **Ochko:** I haven't really come to a set decision on what's happening. It frightens me a little bit. **Brokaw:** What frightens you? **Ochko:** Well, the fact that I'm becoming a minority and my children are a minority in the school system. It's a little daunting. **Brokaw:** And what are the consequences of them becoming a minority? What's the downside? **Ochko:** As of right now, I don't see any large consequences. He doesn't notice any different. But I'm afraid that down the road, there could be some consequences. **Brokaw:** That the valley will become Hispanic—in its culture and in its ethos, in its faith, and everything else? **Ochko:** Correct. And I don't necessarily have a problem with that. But the cultures are—they're very different. And I wanna make sure that my children are comfortable, and they don't feel really different. And I want them to have every advantage that they would if the situation was different.

Standardized test scores in Colorado ARE significantly lower in schools that are predominantly Hispanic, but it is unclear how many of those children are American citizens.

Brokaw: Do you have to check a child when they come here—a young boy or girl and their parents' legal status? **Karen Olson, principal of Crystal River Elementary School:** Nope. We're not the INS.

Karen Olsen, the principal of the Crystal River Elementary School in Carbondale believes the school would be more successful if more White parents would commit to sending their children here.

Olson: This particular area of the country has been very, very Anglo for a very long time. **Brokaw:** So you have some parental flight, I mean? **Olson:** We do. **Brokaw:** Parents were choosing to put their kids in other schools, right? **Olson:** We do have that. They're not saying it's flight per se. But I think it's probably pretty safe to say. **Brokaw:** What's the long term effect of that on the school system? **Olson:** I hope it's not a long term effect actually.

But it was a situation that convinced Susan Tyndall to retire from the Crystal River Elementary School two years ago. She and her husband, who have lived in the valley for 40 years, are dismayed by changes that the influx of Hispanics have brought to this community and especially the schools.

Susan Tyndall, retired teacher: When I finished teaching, I had three Anglo students and like 16 Hispanics. Those three—I just felt so sorry for because they were alone.**Brokaw:** Yeah, everybody else was speaking Spanish for the most part? **Tyndall:** Yeah, they'd go out to recess and they would revert to Spanish. And the Spanish kids would play together and—the three little Anglo children would kind of huddle together too. **Brokaw:** Is it fair to say that the school system is kind of overwhelmed by the problem? **Tyndall:** Yeah. They don't know what to do, and rightly so. I mean—**Brokaw:** Hard to attract good teachers?**Tyndall:** Right. And they don't stay. I've had young teachers tell me, "I'm not gonna teach as long as you did, how could you do this for so long?" **Brokaw:** You have kind of a broken heart about your profession. **Tyndall:** I do. I really do. I loved it, I loved the kids. And I had a wonderful time.

In April, Gould Construction was going through a difficult passage as well. There were plenty of contracts for schools, vacation homes, hotels, bike trails—but not enough workers to complete the projects.

Brokaw: This site behind us is a portrait of Colorado, really. I mean the state is under development. What happens to a site like this if the really extreme opponents of immigration have their way and want to ship everybody back?**Mark Gould:** Well, the cost of construction is gonna go up and so that's a barrier to entry to people getting into their houses.

The Hispanics were still lining up in the lobby of Gould—but many lacked the documentation they needed to get hired.

Gould worked out a deal with the sheriff's office to use inmates at a halfway house. Since Gould picked them up and dropped them off, these workers were reliable.

Later that month, it looked as if Gould's worker shortage might finally be addressed when five Hispanic men showed up looking for work. But then they had no papers on them, so Brett Gould turned them away.

Brett Gould: If you guys have your paperwork, I'd be willing to offer you a job.

The next day, two of these men returned with paperwork.

Brett called the supervisor at the Vail site and told him that help was on the way. Both men lived in Carbondale — and that was no coincidence. It was Trino's younger brother Juan Carlos and he is another illegal immigrant.

Trino's extended family and friends enjoyed a day of soccer on Easter, followed by a traditional Mexican cook-out.

But Vanessa, the 6-year-old who has lived here for 3 years and can't really remember Mexico, told us she prefers pizza.

Trying to preserve their Mexican culture, but also trying to assimilate as Americans, several of the men living in the Carbondale house with Trino and his brothers take English classes at the local middle school.

Two months after he was hired by Gould, Trino, an illegal immigrant, was promoted to bulldozer operator. It was because he had done so well at Gould, that his younger brother Juan Carlos applied for a job there.

In late April, Juan Carlos showed Brett Gould what appeared to be a real Social Security card and he was hired to work at the Vail hotel site under supervisor Sammy Sorenson.

Tom Brokaw: What would happen if they sent all the Mexican laborers back to Mexico?**Sammy Sorenson, work site supervisor:** Well, we probably wouldn't have a work force.**Brokaw:** If you had a real hungry Mexican immigrant coming to work for you. You'd want him first?**Sorenson:** Absolutely, I'd want anybody hungry.

Sorenson was born and raised in this valley. It bothers him that the American workers are the ones that let him down, while the Hispanics are mostly reliable and hard-working.

Brokaw: You started as a ditch digger effectively at Gould construction, right?**Sorenson:** Yeah, Mark—**Brokaw:** Got on the end of what they call an idiot stick, right?**Sorenson:** Yeah.**Brokaw:** And worked you're way up?**Sorenson:** Yeah.**Brokaw:** Young people like you in this valley inclined to do that anymore?**Sorenson:** I don't know any—I don't know that many, no.**Brokaw:** They don't wanna do it?**Sorenson:** It doesn't seem so.**Brokaw:** Why not?**Sorenson:** I'm not real sure. It's a little puzzling to me actually.

Juan Carlos was hungry for a job, but he needed a driver's license to get to work. If he was stopped by police and had no driver's license, he could be arrested and perhaps deported.

Right around the corner from Gould Construction, the fake document market is thriving. It wasn't hard for Juan Carlos to find out where to buy a fake driver's license.

Through the grapevine, he heard of a local woman who was selling illegal Mexican licenses. In May, she took a Polaroid picture of him outside her trailer. A week later she delivered a Mexican driver's license for a fee of \$150.

In Colorado, it's impossible for Juan Carlos to get a state license because he's an illegal immigrant, but he can drive with a foreign license until he establishes a residence.

Brokaw: Do you have a driver's license?**Juan Carlos:** Mexican.**Brokaw:** Is it a real driver's license? Authentico?**Juan Carlos:** no. (laugh) Has been stopped by police twice for speeding, and showed the fake license both times. Police let him go with a warning. **Brokaw:** When your deputies go out on patrol, are they actively looking for illegals? Or do they pick them up when

they have a traffic stop of some kind or another violation?**Sheriff Lou Valleria, Garfield County, Colorado:** I would say we don't actively look for that.

Sherriff Lou Vallerio of Garfield County, Colorado.

Brokaw: Some people say just send them all back.**Valleria:** We have an estimated 6000 illegal aliens just in Garfield county. I have a jail that holds 212 people. Where would I put them?

So it's not a practical solution because the infrastructure is not there.

Brokaw: What if you suspect someone is an illegal?**Valleria:** Any police officer that arrests somebody is required to notify ICE, Immigration Customs Enforcement, to let them know that they have somebody that they believe is illegal. **Brokaw:** That adds to your paperwork, it adds to the kind of bureaucracy.**Valleria:** Well, it certainly will. I mean it will certainly slow them own if an officer is to pick up the phone, call somebody at ICE but at this point if somebody is legal or illegal, for example, on a traffic stop, the same would hold true. They'd get a ticket and be on their way.

It's the double standard when it comes to illegal immigrants and the law that angers many Americans.

Ian Hunkins: My biggest problem with it is when people show up here and they don't follow the rules. I have just as much of a problem with Americans that don't follow rules that I myself have to follow. I don't necessarily agree with rules that I have to follow all the time. But they're rules that are made by our government and you know until they change it's something that I have to deal with.

Ian Hunkins does the same kind of manual labor that Juan Carlos and his brother Trino do, but Ian says he has to obey the law.

Hunkins: From places that I've lived I mean I have lived in condo complexes where I have seen people that—it's a two bedroom. And you can only have probably four people at the most in a two bedroom. And I've walked by, and seen ten, 15 people living in these places.**Brokaw:** And what about taxes?**Hunkins:** Taxes is another thing, you know, I've seen a lot of where they—they claim false things on their tax forms. As how many kids they have so they can get deductions and stuff from the government. It just, you know, I've seen 'em cheat the system.**Brokaw:** A lot of the people that have really strong feelings say, "Look these immigrants are taking jobs from Americans."**Hunkins:** I personally disagree with that. I could quit this company and go work for any other company in the valley in a day and have another job.

But it's a job that most Americans don't seem to want to do. Remember Ray, the American who was hired the same day as Trino? Ray stopped showing up for work after a few days.

Juan Carlos, Trino's brother, replaced Ray at the Vail site.

That month, Gould Construction was so short of labor that Brett Gould had to take the controls of an excavator at a housing site.

Brett Gould: They were short some people so I am out here helping out doing my thing.

As Gould struggled to fill jobs, millions of people took to the streets across the country to protest for the rights of illegal immigrants.

Most people were surprised at the sheer number of protestors who turned out and by the intense feelings the demonstrations provoked on both sides of the immigration issue. But because of the groundswell of support for illegal immigrants, a national day of protest was called for May 1st.

Illegal immigrants and their supporters were told to stay away from work for one day to prove how critical they are to the U.S. economy.

As the immigrants national day of protest approached, Mark Gould worried that his business might shut down because of a lack of workers.

He hoped they would show HIM some loyalty, since he believes he's treated them well.

Mark Gould: If you're giving the guy 14 or 15 bucks an hour. You're paying him overtime. You're paying him 50 hours a week and he's bringing home 7-800 bucks. He is not one of those abused guys. Being out there being paid under the table, I'll pay you cheap. This is just another legitimate employee from our standpoint it is just another legitimate employee that's out there working hard for us.

Would these workers who said they came to America for the work stay on the job May 1st?

On Monday May 1st, millions of immigrants protested across America, including more than a thousand people who gathered in a park in Glenwood Springs, Colorado.

They wanted to be recognized for the contributions they make to America.

But some of the illegal immigrants also worried that this protest might draw the wrong kind of attention and lead to mass deportations.

Jesus: I'm scared this past few months. You know the protests all the protests in Los Angeles, Arizona, Texas.

Trino's older brother and the rest of the family attended the rally.

Maribelle: Well, I feel great because we're fighting for the future well-being we want for our kids. This is where they live. And well this is where we live...

But Trino went to work that day at Gould Construction.

Trino: We come here to work not for not for anything else. We come to work. **Tom Brokaw, NBC News:** You came to work? **Trino:** Yeah. We work and after do my eight hours of work, I go there.

Trino is hoping that all his hard work will pay off and he can eventually return to Mexico and start a business of his own.

Brokaw: Do you wanna be a citizen or do you wanna go back to Mexico? **Trino:** Gonna go back to Mexico. No like this life live it here. We just come to make some money. **Brokaw:** And then go home again? **Trino:** To Mexico to start a business over there. **Brokaw:** How long do you think you'll stay here? **Trino:** Ah, I think probably I'll leave this country when I get—when I get like 30 years old. I'm 23. **Brokaw:** So seven years you'll stay here, make money and then go home? **Trino:** (nods)

Of the 25 Hispanic workers at Gould Construction, only 5 failed to show up for work on May 1st, but the supervisors of those men felt betrayed and they were a little annoyed.

Tim Bagely, worksite supervisor: These people have jobs and here they're taking a day to protest to have a job, basically and, uhh you know, they've all taken the day off.

The Vail construction site was dead on May 1st but that's because Supervisor Sammy Sorenson struck a deal with his men.

Sammy Sorenson: I shut my job down. I made everybody work Sunday and let 'em have Monday off. **Brokaw:** Was there a fair amount of tension during that time? **Sorenson:** I've seen I've seen a lot—there's a lot more tension on the job site. **Brokaw:** Between the Anglos and the Hispanics? **Sorenson:** Yep, it's not—it's not a verbal tension. It's a written tension and I find it in the bathrooms. **Brokaw:** You mean their graffiti is left behind? **Sorenson:** Yep. **Brokaw:** On both sides? **Sorenson:** Yes.

Gould Construction could survive. It could get by for one day without its Hispanic workers, but Sammy is more concerned about whether the American culture will survive the huge influx of Hispanics in the Roaring Fork Valley.

Sorenson: I believe that the way things are right now our culture's gonna be overwhelmed. **Brokaw:** There have been generations of Americans who've come here from other places and they have assimilated? **Sorenson:** Yes. **Brokaw:** They've become part of the broader fabric of American life. **Sorenson:** Yes, and that's what I would say that's the concern. There's such a mass migration happening right now that I don't know that assimilations taking place. So that's what I'm talking about when I say one culture overwhelming another.

It looked that way at the Crystal River Elementary School on May 5th, where the student body is 80 percent hispanic. It was the annual Cinco De Mayo Festival, celebrating a Mexican victory in a big battle.

Tom Tancredo, Republican Tom Tancredo: I am worried about the fact that we are not assimilating people to the extent that we were. I'm worried about the fact that many people coming don't want to assimilate.

Republican Congressman Tom Tancredo of Colorado has made a name for himself in national politics by pushing for tougher measures against illegal immigrants.

Brokaw: Isn't the experience in southern California that a lot of Hispanic Americans have assimilated? I can take you to sections of New York where third generation Italian Americans are cheering the Italians on in the World Cup and going back to the home villages every year because they feel an attachment to it, but they're still first Americans. **Tancredo:** I'm Italian. I still go to the feast of Saint Rocco in Denver. There's nothing wrong with the—celebration of that kind of diversity. I'm all for it. But I'm telling you that I don't recall millions of people in the streets, demanding rights as illegal immigrants—waiving flags of Mexico or American flags upside down. This is a relatively new phenomenon. And—**Brokaw:** Have you ever been to New York during Puerto Rican day parade? **Tancredo:** Yeah, but the difference is dramatic. There is a difference between the expression of ethnic pride and an in your face expression that I think is what was happening in the demonstrations we saw. And it indicated to me there wasn't this degree of assimilation that everybody believes exists.

But it's important to remember that millions of Hispanics have assimilated quite well into America. In fact, more than 300 of the soldiers who have lost their lives in the Iraq war were of Hispanic origin.

From Colorado, two fifth generation Mexican Americans who happen to be brothers have been in public office for years—Democratic Senator Ken Salazar and Democratic Congressman John Salazar.

A week after Cinco de Mayo, as the debate on immigration raged on Capitol Hill. The president made a prime-time speech on immigration.

He called for 6,000 national guard troops to be sent to the border, a temporary worker program, a crackdown on employers who hire illegal workers, and he made the case for a path to citizenship for the estimated 12 million illegal immigrants already in this country.

Mark Gould and some of his friends watched the speech at a Pub in Glenwood Springs.

Mark Gould: We need Hispanics that can make it in this society and to make it in this society, they need to be in the forefront, not in the background hiding.

Trino and his brothers watched from their Carbondale home. They said more border police simply means more bribes.

Trino: You know how much those guys make for an hour? I think they are rich but they are rich with the money we're paying. Not the money the government pays for them.

Mark Gould said he didn't mind being held more accountable as an employer, but he wants some method to find reliable workers.

Mark Gould: We are turning down proposals, requests for proposals every week because we don't have the employees.

And things were about to get worse, as a new law targeting immigrants was about to go into effect in Colorado.

Mark Gould: If it's enforced and everyone complies, we are going to lose a almost ten percent portion of our workforce in Colorado, which is absolutely—will have an impact on our economy.

In Glenwood Springs Colorado, summer officially kicked-off with the annual Strawberry Days Festival.

For a hundred years, the Anglo community wouldn't miss this event. Now the Hispanics don't want to miss it either.

But if the Colorado legislature has its way, the influx of illegal immigrants to Colorado will soon slow down.

On August 1st, Governor Bill Owens signed a series of bills targeting undocumented immigrants.

Immigrants applying for some government benefits like welfare now have to verify their legal status.

Contractors such as Mark Gould who have public projects have to check with the government to make sure their workers are legal.

And immigrants in need of certain healthcare services have to present legal certification.

David Adamson, director at the Mountain Family Health Center: I think it does have the effect of putting a chill over people that are in the country illegally.

Dave Adamson, director at the Mountain Family Health Center says the kind of prenatal care that Maribel got when she was pregnant with Diana is still available to illegal immigrants no questions asked— but the immigrants may not know that.

Adamson: It is very important that women get that care, 'cause they're gonna have a child that's gonna be a U.S. Citizen. But the very idea that they're out there thinking that might not be the case, that's an issue.

Mark Gould says the new law covering employment has hurt his business as well.

Mark Gould: I'd love to tell you that I could computerize the entire process in the construction industry. We go out of our way to use GPS on our bulldozers. We use as high level of tech as we can use, but we still need a guy at the end of the shovel at the end of the day.**Brokaw:** And even if it cuts into your profits a little bit, you're still willing to pay more just to get the workers?**Mark Gould:** We're going to pass on the costs so this isn't about the profit margins. This is about being able to get the work done.

Ever since August, almost no one, Hispanic or Anglo... has applied for the unskilled labor jobs at Gould Construction despite a campaign of radio and newspaper ads.

Mark Gould: It is gonna cost more to build roads , build waterlines, sewer lines, houses than it did last Friday.

Under the new law, the company has to check the legal status of people it wants to hire with Homeland Security.

Mark Gould: From today moving forward if that process checks, which means if you have a name and a Social Security number and a birth date and it checks, then you're golden. If not, you're not hired.

Gould had another problem— the company received a letter from Social Security naming 21 employees, hired the previous year whose Social Security numbers didn't match any on record. The employees were notified about the discrepancy.

At the end of the summer, Gould fired 4 workers who had fraudulent Social Security numbers, including one of Sammy Sorenson's most reliable workers at the Vail hotel site.

But Trino and his brother Juan Carlos were safe for now. The government hadn't detected THEIR fake Social Security numbers.

Gould says this new Colorado law is forcing him to look for new ways to find workers for the next construction season. He's inquiring about temporary work visas but with 66,000 available nationwide, he's not sure how many he can get.

Mark Gould: I mean, I see it as that we're gonna need to go down to Mexico, sponsor an employee, have that employee checked out from a criminal background, from a medical background, give them a biometric identification so that we know where they are and the

government knows where they are and bring them in and have them work, and when we get done with that particular job, they get sent back.

Congressman Tom Tancredo of Colorado believes the crackdown on employers is long overdue because they have long profited, he claims, from illegal labor.

Rep. Tom Tancredo (Colo.): Cheap labor is only cheap to the employer. We pay more for the infrastructure needed for the people who are here illegally than we ever get from them in taxes.**Brokaw:** When people who have strong feelings about the presence of illegal immigrants here say, "I got to say it they're doing the work."**Tom Tancredo:** Sure, they're doing the work. And they're good workers. They are hard workers and they work for less. And if I were an employer, oh boy would I be excited about that possibility.**Brokaw:** You think \$14.00 dollars an hour is working for less?**Tancredo:** Oh, yes, absolutely.

Ian Hunkins, Trino, and his brother Juan Carlos all earned 14-dollars an hour, that's more than construction laborers earned a decade ago in Colorado according to the Department of Labor. But some states pay as much as 20 dollars an hour.

Brokaw: You've made a number of recommendations that you'd like to see happen. You would end the birthright citizenship for illegal aliens. An illegal alien comes here, has a child, a son or a daughter, they become automatically a citizen. You would take that right away from them.**Tancredo:** I would. **Brokaw:** A lot of people got off the boat here at the turn of the century and children were born and they were automatically american citizens, eligible to run for president.**Tancredo:** If you read the fourteenth amendment, not just the amendment, but if you read the discussion leading up to the amendment, it was about slavery and the children of slaves and whether they should be able to have citizenship. That was the purpose of the fourteenth amendment.

Meanwhile, an almost parallel existence is going on in America -- between the legal and illegal populations.

In late September, Trino got married to a young woman who has lived in America for 20 years, illegally.

Together they plan to move to another Colorado town. Trino fully expected to be laid off by Gould Construction in the fall because it was the end of the Colorado construction season.

He's wasn't worried about the new laws hurting his chances for more work. Friends told him that he could get work at the Colorado oil and gas industry.

Even though Trino told us he only came here temporarily for the work, and the money.... now that he's married, that could change everything.

If the newlyweds decide to have a baby here, who will be a new American citizen, it could make it just too hard for them to return home.

Trino and his new wife are just one couple of the estimated 11 million Hispanic immigrants beginning a new life here in America but for all the talk of sending people home, the truth is that this latest massive wave of immigration may now be irreversible.

Trino and his wife may never have heard of Ellis Island, the gateway to the United States for millions of earlier immigrants — the first step toward their American dream. They came for the promise of political freedom and, most of all, economic opportunity for the chance to earn a living wage and give their children a life so much better than their own.

That immigrant experience is central to American history and American character.

But as we see, in the 21st century, the immigrant story has taken a sharp turn into the shadows of broken laws, political controversy, cultural conflicts, and economic survival.

It is a dilemma so emotional and so volatile no one has been able to find a consensus solution — and so the illegals keep on coming, spreading out across the country, doing the jobs so many Americans would rather not take. In this nation of laws, the illegal immigrant has become a fixed and growing part of the landscape, at once a part of America but also separate— living, working and raising families in the shadow of the American dream.

© 2006 MSNBC Interactive

URL: <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/16353653/>