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Bush pushes guest worker program

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WASHINGTON -- President Bush on Friday shoehorned a plug for his guest worker program between making a joke about an award winner and listening to love songs Friday at a White House celebration of Hispanic Heritage Month.

Bush said that as lawmakers debate immigration policy, they need to remember that while enforcing U.S. borders is important, it is only one step in the struggle to stop illegal immigration. He pressed Congress to pass his guest worker program to legally bring in new foreign workers and give some of the country's illegal immigrants a shot at U.S. citizenship.

"We must understand that you can't kick 12 million people out of your country - that we must figure out a way to say to those that if you're lawful and if you've contributed to the United States of America, there is a way for you to eventually earn citizenship," Bush said.

"Nobody in our land wants to grant automatic amnesty. But everybody in our land understands these people must be treated with respect and dignity," he continued. "There are citizenship lines for people from our neighborhood. People ought to be given a chance to get at the back of the citizenship line and have a chance."

Latin pop singer Ana Christina closed the event in the East Room with three love songs, singing one in English and two in Spanish.

Bush opened the event with a few jokes.

"I am proud to be here with Lt. Col. Consuelo Kickbusch," Bush said about an influential Hispanic motivational speaker and the highest ranking Hispanic woman in the Army, who won the 2006 Hispanic Heritage Award.

"Interesting name: Kickbusch," Bush said. "Sounds like a political campaign."