House Hears From Grassroots; Is Senate Listening?

by Phyllis Schlafly Dec. 28, 2005

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Late on Friday evening December 16, the House passed Rep. James Sensenbrenner's (R-WI) Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act (H.R. 4437) to require employers to verify the legal status of each employee. No strong-arm tactics were needed to produce the stunning margin of 239-182, including 36 Democrats, because Members had heard from the grassroots.

Over 130 amendments had been submitted to the Rules Committee by the deadline for amendments at 7:00 p.m. on Tuesday. Members of Congress are finally recognizing that immigration will be the hot-button issue of the next election,and they want to distance themselves from President Bush's unpopular guest-worker-amnesty proposal.

The open-borders advocates realized that the House will not acquiesce in Bush's imperious demand that guest-worker-amnesty be part of any immigration bill. So their fall-back position was to insert sense-of-Congress language in the Sensenbrenner bill that would have no legal effect but would signal the House's willingness to deal with guest-worker-amnesty if the Senate passes it.

Early the next morning, word floated through the cloakroom that this language offered by Rep. Jeff Flake (R-AZ) was likely to be added to the Manager's Amendment: "It is the sense of Congress that a necessary part of securing the international land and maritime border of the United States entails the creation of a secure legal channel by which the foreign workers needed to keep the United States economy growing may enter and leave the country."

At 4:30 p.m. Wednesday, the 90-Member House Immigration Reform Caucus met and agreed to defeat the rule for H.R. 4437 if language supporting guest-worker programs were added to the bill. Defeating the rule would effectively kill the bill.

On Thursday afternoon, the House manifested its new awareness of the public's demand for border control by passing the Hunter Amendment 260-159, including 49 Democrats. This so-called Fence Amendment mandates the construction of specific security fencing, including lights and cameras, along our southwest border for the purpose of gaining operational control of the border.

The bill orders 700 miles of fencing in sectors that have the highest number of immigrant deaths, drug smuggling and illegal border crossings. The bill also orders the Secretary of Homeland Security to conduct a study of the use of physical barriers along our northern border.

The momentum continued on Friday. By 273-148 including 57 Democrats, the House passed the Bob Goodlatte (R-VA)/Stephanie Herseth (D-SD) Amendment to repeal Ted Kennedy's favorite immigration provision, the Diversity Visa Lottery, which admits 50,000 foreigners every year, mostly from Third World and even terror-supporting countries.

Then, the House passed by voice vote the Jim Ryun (R-KS) Amendment, which codifies the Oath of Renunciation and Allegiance as federal law so that it cannot be changed without an act of Congress. The oath requires naturalized citizens to swear to "absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state, or sovereignty of whom or which I have heretofore been a subject or citizen."

Then, the House passed by 237-180, including 30 Democrats, the Charles Norwood (R-GA) Amendment, which reaffirms the inherent authority of state and local law authorities to assist in the enforcement of

immigration law, to provide training on this issue to the local agencies, and to increase law enforcement's access to vital information about illegal criminal aliens.

Then, the House passed by 420-0 the Cliff Stearns (R-FL) Amendment to prohibit the Department of Homeland Security, the U.S. Attorney General, and all courts from granting any kind of legal immigration status (i.e., "benefits") to an alien until the relevant databases of criminal records and terrorist watch lists have been checked.

Then, the House passed by voice vote the Ed Royce (R-CA) Amendment, stating that no immigration benefit may be granted until an FBI fingerprint check has been submitted and the results show that the alien does not have a criminal or immigration history that would render him or her ineligible for benefits provided by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

The Stearns and Royce amendments are important because, according to whistleblowers inside Homeland Security, a significant number of those applying for legal status do not go through complete background checks. When certain checks aren't completed within 90 days, current law allows the application to continue on to the next step anyway.

A Bush Administration-supported amendment to reduce the maximum sentence for illegal entry and illegal presence to six months was defeated 164-257. Current penalties remain in place.

The Senate will begin its debate on border security early next year and is predicted to be favorable to the guest-worker-amnesty plans proposed by President Bush, John McCain (R-AZ), Ted Kennedy (D-MA), John Cornyn (R-TX), and others. The Senate and House bills will then go to a conference committee to work out differences.

Senators who are up for reelection in 2006 had better listen to the House votes.

This column includes our game plan for border security. Tell your Senators we want the Senate to pass the House bill and to reject all guest-workers plans.