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IMMIGRATION REFORM?

Since Speaker Tip O'Neill buried immigration reform legislation last year (by simply taking it off the House calendar), the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) is seeking a 50% increase in the number of Border Patrol officers along the U.S.-Mexican border in order to try to choke off-illegal crossings at key points. That's only a 17% budget increase, and it could be even more important to recipients of unemployment and welfare benefits than any other budget item.

Some say that it would be prohibitively expensive to stem the tide of Mexicans illegally entering the country along our 1,950-mile common border. Immigration Commissioner Alan Nelson says this is not true because 60% of the one million illegal aliens who came here from Mexico last year entered over a distance of only 120 miles (at Chula Vista, CA or El Paso, TX).

The Simpson-Mazzoli immigration reform bill which O'Neill scuttled last year contains a very controverial amnesty provision. It would give immediate permanent resident status to illegal aliens who were in the United States prior to Jan. 1, 1978, and allow them to become citizens five years after this "adjustment of status."

Aliens who entered illegally after Jan. 1, 1978 would form a second group of "legalized" aliens. Afer two years in a "temporary resident alien" status (with federal benefits limited to medical care and aid to the aged, blind and disabled), if they could demonstrate a "minimal understanding of ordinary English," they would get permanent resident status, with citizenship available five years later.

No one knows how many illegal aliens are in our country and eligible for amnesty under this so-called "reform" bill. Some Immigration Service experts have estimated that there may be more than 12 million. The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors estimates that there are 1.1 million in that one county alone.

Amnesty would be granted at the expense of American workers and their jobs. The bill would allow all the illegal aliens who have either legal permanent resident status or

legal temporary resident status to take any job they can get. The bill provides no mechanism for preventing aliens from displacing or adversely affecting wages and working conditions of Americans.

When President Carter first proposed amnesty in 1977, then-Senator Richard Schweiker (R-PA) said, "[Amnesty] puts the government squarely behind the lawbreaker, and in effect, says, 'Congratulations, you have successfully violated our laws and avoided detection -- here is your reward.'" Senator John East told the Senate Judiciary Committee this year that amnesty will hurt American workers and taxpayers, undercut enforcement of our laws, and encourage future illegal immigration.

Senator East points out that, "with the Federal Government in debt in excess of $1 trillion, we cannot afford to support millions of our citizens on public assistance and unemployment programs while millions of jobs are filled by illegal aliens." Every unemployed American costs the Federal Treasury about $7,000 per year in unemployment and welfare benefits, so one million illegal aliens displacing Americans cost the taxpayers $7 billion per year.

Amnesty discriminates against foreigners who obey our immigration laws and are waiting patiently abroad for immigrant visas. The visa backlog is in the hundreds of thousands, and waiting periods of seven years are common. Their chances of getting a visa will be delayed not only by the amnestied illegal aliens themselves, but also by the amnestied illegal aliens' right to bring in their family members within the preference system and without numerical limitation.

Supporters of amnesty assert that it is impossible to find and repatriate the illegal aliens. Senator John East says that is true "only if Congress continues to deny adequate funding to the INS." It probably is no more difficult than the administrative burden which the proposed "reform" bill would impose on the INS to separate the illegal aliens entitled to amnesty from those not entitled to amnesty.

As Senator East pointed out, "illegal aliens live in a world where the use of fraudulent documents is common. Reports of sales of 'amnesty kits' should come as no surprise."