

## **G.O.P. BACKING OFF A DEAL TO RESTORE AID TO IMMIGRANTS**

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### **Body**

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House Republicans today **backed** away from their commitment to **restore** Federal **aid** for certain legal **immigrants**, prompting the Clinton Administration to complain that the Republicans were violating the bipartisan budget agreement reached just five weeks ago.

In addition, a proposal announced today by House Republicans would override a recent White House ruling that state governments must pay the minimum wage to welfare recipients participating in workfare programs.

Administration officials denounced both proposals, which the Republicans have added to a comprehensive bill intended to balance the Federal budget.

Vice President Al Gore said the proposals on **immigrants** were "harsh, unfair and unnecessary." Moreover, he said, "they violate the terms of the bipartisan budget agreement by failing to **restore** a minimal safety net" for legal **immigrants** who have not become citizens. Mr. Gore said the proposals "would cut **off** 100,000 severely disabled **immigrants** who would receive benefits under the budget agreement."

The agreement, reached on May 2, was a framework for legislation to balance the budget. Republicans are now filling in the details, and they said today that they did not feel obliged to accept every item in the agreement.

Representative Sander M. Levin of Michigan, the ranking Democrat on the House Ways and Means subcommittee that writes welfare legislation, said the proposals on **immigrants** "clearly violate the budget agreement." Accordingly, he said, "this bill is heading toward confrontation instead of bipartisan accord."

Representative E. Clay Shaw Jr. of Florida, the chief author of the 1996 welfare law, said the Republicans were improving the budget agreement, by guaranteeing benefits for certain elderly **immigrants** rather than for those who become disabled.

The Republicans are playing with political fire in restricting benefits for legal **immigrants**. Their proposals have proved unpopular in parts of Florida, Texas and other states with many **immigrants**. And the party itself is divided, with some Republicans like Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani of New York urging Congress to **restore aid** to legal **immigrants**.

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After learning of the new proposal by Congressional Republicans, Colleen A. Roche, a spokeswoman for Mayor Giuliani, said, "The proponents of this change should be ashamed of themselves for trying to play off the elderly against the disabled." Lobbyists for the elderly echoed that comment.

Supporters of legal immigration, including Hispanic groups, Jewish organizations and Roman Catholic bishops, criticized the Republican proposals as a retreat from the budget agreement.

The Republicans' welfare proposals are much more contentious than their Medicare proposals, which were unanimously approved tonight by the Ways and Means Subcommittee on Health.

The welfare law signed by Mr. Clinton on Aug. 22, 1996, cut off many Federal benefits for noncitizens. Restoring some of those benefits is a top priority for the President.

The Congressional Budget Office estimates that 500,000 legal immigrants will lose Supplemental Security Income benefits this summer because of the law. The program, for the indigent elderly and the disabled, pays a maximum of \$484 a month for an individual and \$726 a month for a couple.

The budget agreement, negotiated by Mr. Clinton and Congressional Republican leaders, explicitly promised to "restore Supplemental Security Income and Medicaid eligibility for all disabled legal immigrants who are or become disabled and who entered the United States prior to Aug. 23, 1996."

The new Republican bill would restore benefits only for those who were actually receiving benefits on Aug. 22, not for those who were in the United States then and later become disabled.

Many immigrants have relatives or other "sponsors" in the United States who agreed to support them. Under today's Republican proposal, an immigrant could not receive Supplemental Security Income payments if the sponsor's income was more than 50 percent above the official poverty level. A family of three would meet this test if it had income exceeding \$18,775 a year.

Republicans said they assumed that such a family could take full financial responsibility for a disabled immigrant. Vice President Gore said that the assumption was unwarranted.

When Mr. Clinton signed the welfare bill, he said he would fight to restore benefits for legal immigrants. Republicans like Mr. Shaw contend that the budget agreement went too far. "Supplemental Security Income has become a pension plan for third-world countries," Mr. Shaw said today.

Mr. Shaw also said that Republicans never intended for the minimum wage to apply to workfare participants.

Workfare programs require welfare recipients to work in return for their benefits. Governors of both parties said that any requirement for them to pay the minimum wage would vastly increase the cost of their work programs.

The Republicans' new proposal says that welfare recipients working for a public agency or a nonprofit organization shall not be considered employees for purposes of the Fair Labor Standards Act or any other Federal law. The minimum wage -- now \$4.75 an hour, rising to \$5.15 on Sept. 1 -- is part of the labor standards law.

The Republican proposal says that states may count welfare, food stamps, Medicaid, child care and housing subsidies as income for people in workfare programs. States divide the amount of such income by the minimum wage to determine the number of hours that a person may be required to work for a public agency or a nonprofit organization.

It is easier for states to meet the law's work requirements if they can count government benefits as income. But Elena Kagan, the President's deputy assistant for domestic policy, said: "The Administration strongly opposes these provisions. They are clearly outside the scope of the budget agreement. They violate the principle that workfare participants, like other workers, should get the benefit of the minimum wage and other worker-protection laws."

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