

**IMMIGRATION IS ON FRONT BURNER FOR CONGRESS< FINISHING A BILL
IS A KEY TASK THIS FALL. WITH A VETO< THREAT AND SPLITS IN THE
GOP, IT MIGHT NOT BE EASY.**

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Body

Just how tough should the United States get with the estimated 300,000 foreigners who enter the country illegally each year?

That's a question **Congress** will consider this week when members resume work on an **immigration bill** that would toughen asylum laws and let states deny schooling to children of illegal immigrants.

President Clinton has threatened to **veto** the measure.

There is bipartisan consensus that action is needed against illegal **immigration**. House and Senate members of a negotiating committee returning yesterday from a summer recess will seek to find accommodation on details of a **bill**.

Immigration, along with unfinished work on the various appropriations **bills** that need to be passed before the start of the new budget year Oct. 1, is at the top of the agenda for what promises to be a relatively short post-recess legislative period.

Both the Republican and Democratic leaderships have talked about a congressional getaway by early October to allow lawmakers to campaign. Besides **immigration**, another social issue sure to get attention this month involves a Republican-backed **bill** aimed at withholding federal sanction for same-sex marriages.

Republicans say 40 years of Democratic congressional leadership compromised the integrity of the nation's borders and overburdened public services in areas flooded with undocumented immigrants. But some Democrats and **immigration** advocacy groups have criticized the **immigration** overhaul.

"In its understandable zeal to discourage illegal **immigration** and prevent abuse of our asylum laws, the House has crossed the line from tough to cruel," said Stephen Legom-sky, a law professor at Washington University in St. Louis.

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The House and Senate passed separate immigration bills earlier this year, and the House-Senate conference committee must decide whether the final version of the bill will include provisions that would make it harder for foreigners to receive U.S. asylum.

The bill that emerges could permanently bar deported illegal immigrants from reentering the United States and could raise income requirements for people who want to bring foreign relatives into the United States.

A House provision to give states authority to expel illegal immigrant children from public schools has drawn the noisiest opposition, especially since more than half of senators - including conservative Texas Republicans Phil Gramm and Kay Bailey Hutchison - said they could not vote for it.

And in an Aug. 3 letter to House Speaker Newt Gingrich, Clinton said he would veto a bill containing such a provision.

Republicans agreed last month to submit a compromise to the negotiating committee that would allow states to decide whether to charge tuition to the families who cannot prove their children are legal U.S. residents.

Both the compromise and the original amendment "would result in kicking children out of school and onto the streets," Clinton said.

Also unresolved was what the government should do to reduce abuse of U.S. laws that permit foreigners to claim asylum based on alleged persecution in their own countries.

The House bill would eliminate hearings and appeals for foreigners who arrive in the United States without proper documents. An immigration officer would decide whether a person had a credible fear of persecution.

Republicans have said that too many asylum-seekers do not face persecution but claim asylum merely to avoid the time-consuming legal immigration process.

Opponents say the provision could send some foreigners with legitimate claims back into the hands of their tormentors without a fair hearing. A person sneaking out of a home country often cannot get the proper documents, they say.

The Senate bill would permit the attorney general to call a hearing during emergencies.

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