

HOUSE OKS TOUGH IMMIGRATION CURBS

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Body

WASHINGTON The House voted 305 to 123 yesterday for a bill to crack down on illegal immigration and cut spending on legal immigrants.

With Senate action still due, the White House sought changes to strengthen enforcement against employers who hire illegals and to soften curbs on government benefits for immigrants here lawfully.

The bill would:

Double the size of the Border Patrol to 10,000 agents.

Authorize new fences on the Mexican border.

Set up a system for employers to voluntarily check the status of employees.

Make it harder for aliens to fight deportation, and for refugees to win political asylum.

Bar Americans from sponsoring spouses, children and other family members for entry unless they earn well above the poverty level.

Toughen sponsors' financial responsibilities.

Deny legal immigrants' access to many public benefit programs, and allow deportation of those who use other programs for over a year.

The bill's chief sponsor, Rep. Lamar Smith (R-Tex.), said it tells legals they are welcome "to contribute and work and produce, but you can't come to take advantage of the taxpayers."

Rep. Nydia Velazquez (D-Brooklyn) charged legal aliens "who play by the rules and pay taxes" were being unfairly branded "untouchables."

Rep. Tom Manton whose west Queens district has a large illegal population was the only New York City Democrat to vote for the bill. Overall, 76 Democrats voted yes.

Rep. Pete King (R-L.I.), one of five Republicans opposing the bill, said it "violated the American tradition" of asylum for the "politically persecuted."

The House voted 254 to 175 for a separate bill letting states expel illegal aliens' kids from schools.

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But with President Clinton pledging a veto, and Congress itching to adjourn within a week, no Senate action was expected.

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