

## *Giving immigrants the boot*

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### **Body**

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It used to be that when an immigrant showed up in this country, we'd ask, "Do you buy the Declaration, the Constitution, the Bill of Rights and, you know, all that stuff?"

And the immigrant would say, "Yis, I bey all dot," and we'd say: "Great! Look, everybody: a new American!"

And two generations later, the grandkids were running grocery stores, racing Indy cars, growing artichokes, teaching phys-ed and cranking out Hudsons.

Congress ---an elected body of the descendants of immigrants --- spent much of its session this year repelling new Americans. It was not a pretty sight.

Republicans most keenly, but numerous Democrats as well, claimed to be going after illegal immigration.

Fine, but their legislation makes it painfully clear that mainly the members were just beating up on furriners, for which they expect to be rewarded with re-election.

Congress raised the bar against refugees seeking political asylum and stripped them of appeals to the courts if they draw an immigration officer who doesn't understand their predicament or doesn't care about it.

In repugnant violation of our history as a safe haven, we'll start sending the doomed back to certain persecution, their fate probably worsened by their flight to escape it.

Say "Hi" to the firing squad for us, Juan.

At least Congress gave up on two of its dumbest ideas.

Illegal immigrants won't be denied immunizations; Congress finally figured out that setting off plagues was probably not a good idea.

And Congress backed away from refusing schooling to the kids here illegally, after police departments explained that creating packs of illiterate street urchins wasn't demonstrably in the national interest.

There are a few useful provisions in the new legislation.

Border patrols will be doubled. Penalties for smuggling aliens are increased. A new employee-verification system, perhaps more effective, will be tested voluntarily in a few states. There'll be more Immigration and Naturalization Service officers to investigate illegal hirings.

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But INS also will be allowed additional arbitrary exclusion powers; the agency has a lamentable history of misusing the ones it already has.

Most social services will be denied not only to illegal immigrants but also to legal ones, a pointless inhumanity sure to set off a rush for naturalization at a time when immigrant services such as English classes already are overwhelmed.

And citizens and resident aliens who want to sponsor relatives must earn 125 percent of the poverty level ---a backhanded way to cut legal immigration. (And a weird version of family values.)

Appalled, a Hungarian-born New York financier and philanthropist, George Soros, is donating \$ 50 million to help legal immigrants ---small potatoes to the lost federal aid, but a dead-on gesture.

The charity will be called the Emma Lazarus Fund, after the poet whose "Give us your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free" garnishes the Statue of Liberty.

Immigrant joke: How many immigrants does it take to be smarter than the Congress of the United States?

Just one, if his name is Soros.

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## Classification

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