

ILLEGALS GET 3-WK. BREAK

Daily News (New York)

October 01, 1997, Wednesday

Copyright 1997 Daily News, L.P.

Section: News; Pg. 8

Length: 407 words

Byline: By KEVIN McCOY

Body

Congress yesterday approved a three-week extension of a program that lets immigrants seek legal status without leaving the U.S., but confusion continued as thousands of people crowded immigration offices.

Hours before the final Senate vote, a long line snaked outside the Immigration and Naturalization Service office in lower Manhattan. The crowd included many who were unaware of the reprieve from yesterday's midnight deadline and didn't know that the office would take only mail applications.

"I heard it was the final day," said Olga Stipanovic, an illegal immigrant who came six years ago from the former Yugoslavia. "I don't know the laws. It's very confusing."

"We aren't taking any chances," said Simon Baptiste, a Trinidadian immigrant who joined the line with paper work for two countrymen.

"We want to do it, and do it right," he said.

Officials for immigration advocacy groups in New York and across the nation said they had fielded thousands of calls from immigrants worried about the threatened end of the pilot program.

"I think people are still very confused about what's going on," said Paul Finnegan of the Emerald Island Immigration Center in New York.

Since September 1994, the law enabled illegal immigrants to seek residency without returning to apply at consulates in their homelands. Applicants are required to pay a \$ 1,000 penalty, obtain sponsorship from a close relative or employer and meet other eligibility rules.

About 345,000 immigrants applied nationwide in 1995 and 1996. An additional 214,000 are expected to apply this year, including more than 33,000 who applied in New York City from June through August.

Advocates seeking extension of the law say the provision avoids separation of families and saves employers from losing valuable workers for months or even years.

But critics, led by Rep. Lamar Smith (R-Tex.), chairman of the House immigration and claims subcommittee, say the law unfairly benefits illegal aliens. Extending the law would "insult those legal immigrants who have played by the rules and waited their turn to enter the country," Smith wrote to colleagues last week.

The argument failed to sway the House, which approved an extension to Oct. 23 by a 355-to-57 vote on Monday.

The Senate voted 99-to-0 approval yesterday without debate, setting the stage for a discussion on the program later this year. The President's approval is expected.

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Subject: IMMIGRATION (94%); ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS (89%); APPROVALS (89%); LEGISLATIVE BODIES (89%); IMMIGRATION LAW (89%); US REPUBLICAN PARTY (79%); US FEDERAL GOVERNMENT (79%); CITIZENSHIP (78%); EMBASSIES & CONSULATES (50%)

Company: IMMIGRATION & NATURALIZATION SERVICE (58%); IMMIGRATION & NATURALIZATION SERVICE (58%)

Organization: IMMIGRATION & NATURALIZATION SERVICE (58%); IMMIGRATION & NATURALIZATION SERVICE (58%)

Person: LAMAR SMITH (59%)

Geographic: NEW YORK, NY, USA (90%); NEW YORK, USA (91%); TEXAS, USA (79%); UNITED STATES (79%)

Load-Date: October 1, 1997