

A self-defeating immigrant policy

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Body

The nation's increasing contempt for illegal **immigrants** was reflected a few days ago in the House of Representatives' vote, 257 to 163, to deny public education to the children of these **immigrants**. Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole, the presumed Republican presidential candidate, backs the proposed legislation.

President Clinton opposes it. Fortunately, he is not alone. The nation's major police organizations, along with the Chicago Police Department, have written to Dole urging him to reverse his stand. Officials and beat officers agree that the government should do more to curb illegal immigration, but they argue that kicking kids out of school is not the answer. "One of our biggest problems is to develop a positive alternative to gangs and drugs for our youngest children with free time after school," Los Angeles County Sheriff Sherman Block told the New York Times. "To literally have them loose on the street . . . I don't see how that would be positive."

SHUT SCHOOL

Block may be exaggerating the seriousness of the situation, but hardly anyone is overstating the cost to educate undocumented youngsters. California lawmakers claim, for example, that the state instructs 355,000 **immigrant** pupils at a cost of \$ 1.8-billion annually. Other states with high **immigrant** populations, such as Florida, Texas and Arizona, also pay disproportionate sums to teach **immigrant** children. Clearly, this obligation represents the worst kind of unfunded mandate.

Few people expect the provision to get past the Supreme Court, which already has ruled that such a restriction is unconstitutional. Still, something must be done to give affected states adequate economic relief. The omnibus immigration measure contains several provisions that offer some hope. Clinton, however, promises to veto the entire bill if the school section remains.

The president and the police are right. Kicking children out of school is wrong and **self-defeating**. Gov. Lawton Chiles has a better idea: The feds should tighten the borders, give immigration officials more authority and more tools with which to perform their job and automatically compensate school districts for the money spend on **immigrant** children. Shutting the schoolhouse door is unrealistic and wrong.

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