

U.S. immigration policies: From the absurd to the ridiculous

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Body

Good news for two of the deceased 9-11 terrorists: Their student visas have been approved. Reaching what we can only assume is an entirely new level of idiocy and incompetence, the Immigration and Naturalization Service notified a flight school in Venice, Fla., last week that Mohamed Atta and Marwan al-Shehhi were approved for student visas.

Ironically, the notification came on the six-month anniversary of the day that Atta and al-Shehhi hijacked U.S. planes and forced them to fly into the World Trade Center.

In what has to be the understatement of all time, an INS spokesman called this fiasco "certainly embarrassing" and added that this only shows "that the current system for collecting information and tracking foreign students is antiquated, outdated and inaccurate." What do you do to the administrators of a vitally important agency who aren't paying attention to what they are doing or its consequences? We're waiting for the answer to that question.

Who then is looking after the security of U.S. citizens and why did the otherwise sensible Sen. Dianne Feinstein permit herself to be shouted down by the education establishment when she suggested a more sophisticated foreign student tracking system after 9-11? But instead of remaining firm, special interests triumphed again because foreign students bring in a lot of tuition money.

And if all that isn't bad enough, while the news of the belated terrorist visas was being released, Congress was busy voting to adopt the infamous "Section 245i," a bill that dismisses U.S. immigration laws entirely and lets illegal aliens unchecked, untracked and unscreened achieve permanent legal residency by finding a "spouse" and paying our government \$1,000.

Why the urgency to make it easier for illegal immigrants to gain residency? President Bush plans to visit Mexican President Vicente Fox, and instead of bringing a bottle of wine like any considerate guest, he wants to show up with a mini-amnesty in hand. Every amnesty costs the American people billions of dollars.

Someone at the New York Times must have a sense of humor: Last Wednesday's front page featured a headline about the "Bush Amnesty" right next to the story about the hijacker visas. Bush's response? Besides "not being able to get (his) coffee down" when he found out about the visas, he told reporters at a news conference the same day that it's "way past time" to reform the INS. How? He didn't say. Maybe the agency needs to invent more efficient procedures for those who pay bribes to be "legal."

Section 245i is another sell-out of U.S. sovereignty to Mexico's need for \$12 billion a year in remittances. And, unfortunately, the rest of the world knows how easy it is to get into the United States and remain here. Anyone ready to make a run for our borders, or paddle onto our shores, now has new hope all they have to do is physically get here, spend a little cash and millions are home free. What if the rest of our legal system

worked this way? This is not how a civilized society operates, and it doesn't take a genius to see that this kind of permissiveness only encourages more of the same behavior.

The good news, however, is the tiny margin by which 245i passed. One vote. That's all. If one more Congress member had been made aware of how dangerous this bill is on so many levels national security and national integrity to name two we could have saved ourselves from this frankly embarrassing legislative blunder and 245i would now be just another averted disaster.

Luckily, there's some good news. While 245i may have made it through the House, it hasn't made it through the Senate, where it could get held up by some of its more outspoken opponents. Notably, the congressional votes themselves seem to show us just how heated this issue is becoming. For instance, Republicans voted 123-92 against Bush and against party lines. Even a few tried and true Democrats couldn't stand behind 245i, and voted against their party leaders.

Fortunately Rep. Tom Tancredo, R-Colo., insisted on a "recorded vote" beforehand, which means that no one got to hide their votes, and the public has full access to information about who voted "yea" and who "nay" which may have influenced some of the members' decisions. After all, who wants their constituents to know that they support something as irresponsible as 245i?

The fact that there were an impressive 137 "nay" votes, as opposed to last year's 43 nays for the same bill, gives good reason for hope. There are also trends in Congress indicating a positive shift in representatives' views on immigration and national security issues. For instance, Tancredo well known for his tough stance on immigration is gaining popularity among his peers, and there is even a group of "Tancredo Republicans" who, like many Americans, want to see tighter borders and more realistic immigration policies.

America endured a number of amnesties under the Clinton administration adding millions of unscreened illegal immigrants to our population and President Bush has been pushing for even more, but considering what is happening in Congress now, the "amnesty heyday" may finally be on its way out. Let's hope so, for all of our sakes and for the future of this country. If there's a next time, it's doubtful that any of us will be able to get our coffee down.

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