

Food Stamps Voted for Some Immigrants; Senate Action Would Restore Benefit to 250,000 Thrown Off Rolls in Welfare Bill - Correction Appended

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 **Correction Appended**

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Body

The **Senate** **voted** overwhelmingly yesterday to **restore food stamps** to a quarter-million legal **immigrants** after conservatives failed to derail the measure on grounds that it amounted to a retreat from welfare reform.

The controversial **restoration** was included in a wide-ranging bill that would also provide new funds for agriculture research and guarantees for crop insurance, reflecting an urban-rural coalition that has prevailed on **food stamp** and farm issues for many years.

The bill, approved by a **vote** of 92 to 8, heads to the House, where it also has a broad base of support but could face strong objections from conservatives. A House leadership aide said the bill will not be taken up before the Memorial Day recess. "After that, it depends on how much opposition there is to **restoration** of welfare benefits," the aide said.

The key test in the **Senate** came on a move by Sen. Phil Gramm (R-Tex.) to send the measure back to the House-**Senate** conference committee that pulled the several proposals together into one bill.

While Gramm opposed **restoration** of **food stamps** to **immigrants** who had been declared ineligible by the 1996 welfare overhaul legislation, he hoped to maximize his support by trying to strip out just one provision that would let refugees and recipients of political asylum collect **food stamps** for seven years instead of five.

But he lost, 77 to 23, after critics charged his proposal could doom the whole bill and argued it was unfairly targeting victims of foreign persecution, many from communist or formerly communist countries.

Also, Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman had warned he would recommend a presidential veto if these people were excluded.

By offering **immigrants food stamps**, the bill "puts a big neon sign at the border of the United States of America, 'Come and get welfare,' " Gramm argued. "I want people to come to America to go to work . . . not for welfare as a way of life."

"The Statue of Liberty holds a torch of freedom, not a book of **food stamps** and a lifetime right not to have to work," added Sen. Lauch Faircloth (R-N.C.).

But Agriculture Committee Chairman Richard G. Lugar (R-Ind.) said the House-**Senate** conferees would stick by its decision to include refugees and those granted asylum. Sen. Tom Harkin (D-Iowa) said the seven-year extension was included because it takes that long -- or longer -- for these groups to achieve citizenship. They are "not

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swarming across our borders" and must prove they were victims of persecution, Lugar said. The U.S. welcomes refugees because "this is the kind of country we are," he added.

The 1996 welfare overhaul bill eliminated food stamps and other welfare benefits for about 900,000 legal immigrants. Last year's budget-balancing bill restored some benefits -- but not food stamps -- for about 250,000 of them, primarily young, elderly and disabled immigrants who were in the country at the time the welfare bill passed.

The current bill would restore food stamps to this same group of 250,000 at an estimated annual cost of \$ 818 million. Restoration to all the recipients could have cost \$ 3 billion, officials have estimated.

According to figures compiled by Harkin aides, failure to allow for food stamp payments in the sixth and seventh year after arrival of a refugee or asylum-seeker could have resulted in a cutoff for about 40,000 people a year after the five-year period had passed.

Physicians for Human Rights, an advocacy group that supported the food stamp restoration, released a study last week that it described as showing "alarmingly high" levels of hunger among legal immigrants in three states: California, Texas and Illinois.

President Clinton hailed the Senate's action and urged the House to act quickly, saying the legislation "provides important benefits to America's farmers and to those who have come to this country seeking a brighter future."

Correction

An article yesterday on the Senate vote to restore food stamps to some legal immigrants incorrectly stated the cost. The proposal would cost an estimated \$ 818 million over five years.

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