

***U.S. touts record in deported illegals;  
IMMIGRATION: Removals are up 62 percent over a year ago, but the  
estimated pool of 5 million living here has not been dented.***

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## **Body**

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Federal officials deported a record 111,794 illegal

immigrants in the past year, but more people are still illegally crossing U.S. borders than are being sent back to their native countries.

Attorney General Janet Reno and Immigration and Naturalization Service Commissioner Doris Meissner on Thursday said when the 76,844 people who were removed from the United States without formal proceedings are added to the number deported, nearly 190,000 illegals will have left the country in the past 12 months.

"Our removal efforts are part of this administration's plan to create a seamless web of enforcement from the border to the workplace," Reno said at her weekly news briefing. "Our method is very simple: Those who immigrate legally are welcome, while those who do not abide by our laws will be sent home. "

But while Reno and Meissner basked in the fact that removals are up 62 percent over the year before, they acknowledged that each year 275,000 illegal immigrants enter the United States, and that the government's increased efforts have not yet put a dent in the 5 million illegal immigrants estimated to be living in the United States.

"I think the important point is that all the trend lines are in the right direction," said Meissner, whose agency has been under

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fire this year for everything from failure to properly screen new citizens for criminal records to questions over the accuracy of its data.

In California, where the largest number of illegal immigrants are concentrated, 46,000 illegals were removed in the past year.

Removals were up 50 percent in the Los Angeles district, which includes Orange County. In the past year, 8,357 were deported, compared with 5,597 the year before.

Rep. Lamar Smith, R-Texas, who has been one of the INS' harshest critics, Thursday applauded the agency's deportation efforts and expressed his desire to see the numbers increase even more.

"We're not falling as far behind as fast as we used to," said Smith, who said the INS "is moving in the right direction. "

What concerns Smith, who chairs the House subcommittee on immigration, is that despite the increases in deportations, "if you are not convicted of a serious crime, there's only a 1 percent chance you'll ever be deported if you get into the United States. "

Meissner and Reno attributed INS' ability to increase its deportations largely to the fact that its budget for deportations has increased two and a half times over the past two years and that the number of detention beds for illegal immigrants has doubled.

The Clinton administration's top priority for deporting illegal immigrants is getting to those who have committed crimes in the United States.

In the past year, Meissner said, "we averaged just under 1,000 criminal removals each week. That is compared to about 700 per week last year. " Of the 111,794 deportations in the past year, 50,165 were convicted criminals. Of those, 43 percent had committed aggravated felonies that involved drugs.

One program that has helped INS officials snag an increased number of criminal illegal immigrants is one under which INS agents are stationed in federal and state prisons and illegals are processed and given deportation hearings while they are serving their

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sentences for the crimes they committed here.

The Anaheim city jail has been a model for a program that expands the efforts to local jails, and Congress is expected to vote on a bill next week that will make the Anaheim program permanent and puts agents in other local jails across the country.

The 1996 immigration reform law has also played a role in increasing the number of illegal immigrants sent home, Meissner said. Under the new so-called expedited removal program, people who

INS agents believe are trying to enter the country illegally can be more quickly identified at airports and other points of entry and sent immediately home.

Since that program took effect on April 1, Meissner said, 23,000 entering immigrants have been sent home under that provision.

"We are doing our best to implement it as carefully as possible," Meissner said, "while continuing to monitor that our implementation is protecting legitimate claims for asylum. "

Meissner said the number of people granted asylum has not appreciably changed as a result of the new law.

## Graphic

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GRAPH; GRAPH; RECORD DEPORTATION NUMBERS - Bar graph shows number of illegal immigrants deported for year ending 9/30/97 by type, for the total U.S. and for the Los Angeles district

## Classification

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