

GOV. WILSON TRIES AGAIN

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Body

What California **Gov.** Pete **Wilson** couldn't achieve with a ballot proposition that has been blocked in the courts, he is **trying** to do by executive order. Taking advantage of a provision in the new federal welfare law, he has cut off illegal immigrants' access to benefits including housing, prenatal care and child abuse prevention.

If the move can withstand a likely legal challenge, it may advance the governor's punitive agenda against those who enter the United States unlawfully. But it isn't likely to make the nation's borders less porous or improve the lives of Californians.

Mr. **Wilson** was a major proponent of Proposition 187, the initiative that won strong approval from voters in 1994 but was immediately held up by the courts. That proposition would have kept illegal immigrants out of public schools and barred them from receiving social welfare services or non-emergency health care. The judge who has blocked implementation of its provisions said it usurped federal authority over immigration.

Now, using a provision he had maneuvered to inclusion in the federal welfare law, Mr. **Wilson** is **again** moving against the 2 million illegal aliens in California. His order falls under part of the law that lets states provide services to unlawful immigrants only by enacting new laws that affirm they are eligible. The law also calls for an 18-month period during which the Justice Department must issue rules on how the immigration status of people who are seeking public services can be verified.

Opponents of Mr. **Wilson's** new order say that until those rules are complete, any move to deny services to anyone is illegal. They worry, with good reason, that any Californians who appear to be immigrants, physically or by name, may be subject to untoward efforts to verify their legal status.

A more fundamental concern is the effect Mr. **Wilson's** order will have on the lives of all his constituents. Do residents of California really feel that foreign families who are desperate for a better life will stop at the border because they can't receive some government services? Once they have entered the United States, will such families - and the communities in which they live - really be better off with no prenatal care and no access to programs designed to prevent child abuse?

The best way to solve the problem of illegal immigrants is to prevent them from entering the country in the first place, or to deport them once they have been discovered. Already, deportations so far this year exceed the number for all of 1995 because of a higher budget for immigration officials. But as long as illegal aliens are here, making their lives as miserable as possible - particularly children who had little say over where they will live - is both cruel and counter to traditions this nation should **try** to uphold, not erase.

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