

ILLEGAL HELP FLAP BURIES TRUTH

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Body

As Dianne Feinstein and Michael Huffington pummeled each other Saturday over the **illegal help** they each once employed, their turbocharged rhetoric threatened to drown out the **truth** behind each incident.

"Congressman Huffington admits he broke federal immigration law," announces the ad Feinstein is running this weekend. "Dianne Feinstein broke no federal immigration laws."

"The Associated Press now proves Feinstein lied -- flat out lied" when she said she had never employed an **illegal** worker, Huffington's weekend ad declares.

But with the addition Saturday of a few tantalizing new pieces of detail, the distinctions between the two cases became sharper still.

Huffington 10 days ago admitted violating federal law by employing an **illegal** nanny. Feinstein's hiring of an **illegal** housekeeper did not violate federal law. What remains unclear in her case is whether she knew her former housekeeper was **illegal**. She has denied having such knowledge, but if she did then she may have broken state law.

Documents in question

Feinstein hired Annabella del Rosario Legrand Cabrera Realegeno, a Guatemalan national, as her housekeeper in March 1980. Feinstein says Realegeno showed documents indicating she could work legally for Feinstein, but the Immigration and Naturalization Service revealed Friday that Realegeno had no such valid documents. Realegeno had entered the United States from Guatemala in November 1979, under a visa that allowed her to stay for a year to work only in her country's San Francisco consulate.

"Whether her visa expired or not, I have no way of knowing," Feinstein said in West Hollywood Saturday. "I cannot tell you what it was that she handed me except that it was documentation."

Jim Mayock, a San Francisco immigration attorney, said INS policies on documentation were so inconsistent in the 1980s that it is impossible to know what Feinstein may have seen. It is possible an expiration date was included in the woman's passport, but also possible that no date was written there.

Under laws in place in the early 1980s, Feinstein was not required to ask for any documentation, and she broke no federal law by hiring an **illegal** worker.

Did she know?

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However, she may have violated the state labor code if she hired the woman knowing that she was an illegal immigrant.

Feinstein provided W-2 forms that showed she paid taxes for her housekeeper in 1980 and 1981. She said she could not find the 1982 records. Realegeno left Feinstein's employ in 1982.

Is Feinstein telling the truth when she says she had no idea Realegeno was illegal? On Saturday, Huffington released a letter Feinstein wrote to the INS in 1988 to support Realegeno's application for permanent residency. "Annabella's immigration status has been somewhat mixed up during the years, and I have always tried to help her get it straightened out," Feinstein wrote.

Huffington says this proves Feinstein knew Realegeno's true immigration status. Her campaign director, Kam Kuwata, said, "The letter proves nothing. It means that when she needed help, Dianne tried to help her."

One thing is clear

If parts of the Feinstein situation remain as murky as unfiltered apple juice, the details of Huffington's hiring of an illegal immigrant are as clear as Evian.

When initially asked whether he had ever employed an illegal immigrant, Huffington said, "Not to my knowledge."

But shortly thereafter, he acknowledged that he and his wife employed a Mexican woman, Marisela Garcia, as a nanny for their two daughters from 1989 through 1993. He said that when he found out she was in the country illegally, he repeatedly told his wife to fire her. She didn't.

The couple did not pay the appropriate taxes for the first 13 months Garcia worked for them. Last week, the Huffingtons paid more than \$10,000 in back state and federal taxes, penalties and interest. They say that is how much they owe. By employing Garcia, Huffington violated the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act, which requires employers to verify their employees are here illegally and have permission to work. He has acknowledged that he broke that law, and the INS is now investigating.

Notes

ELECTION 1994 See also related story on this page.

Graphic

Photos (2);

PHOTO: Feinstein

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PHOTO: Huffington

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