

Congress Eases Curbs On Visas For Artists

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Body

In its rush to adjournment last week, **Congress** passed a bill **easing** severe restrictions on the number of foreign **artists** who may enter the United States for performances. The bill rescinds or modifies important provisions of a 1990 immigration law under which only 25,000 foreign performers and other professionals could receive entry **visas** to the United States annually.

The bill was passed last Monday by the House and last Tuesday by the Senate, in both cases by voice vote. The principal sponsors were Representative Romano L. Mazzoli, Democrat of Kentucky, and Senators Edward M. Kennedy, chairman of the Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration and Refugee Affairs; Alan K. Simpson, Republican of Wyoming, and Paul Simon, Democrat of Illinois.

The bill will now go to President Bush for signing, within the next two weeks. Senator Simpson, the Republican whip, has said in interviews that the President will approve the bill.

A coalition of a dozen arts organizations supported the new bill, complaining that **Congress** passed the restrictive provisions in 1990 without consulting the industry. They said it would seriously affect their ability to mount foreign presentations in the United States.

"This bill addresses the problems we had with the old bill," said Frank J. Donatelli, a lobbyist for the League of American Theaters and Producers, one of the sponsors of new legislation.

"Basically, the new bill returns the immigration law to the status that existed before the 1990 immigration bill," said Mr. Donatelli.

The original 1990 measure would have gone into effect on Oct. 1, but was postponed because of the strong protests from arts groups, producers' organizations and labor unions.

These critics also objected to a prohibition in the 1990 bill that prevented performers from applying for a **visa** more than 90 days before a scheduled visit to the United States. Presenters of operas and ballets and theatrical productions complained that such performances have to be scheduled years in advance, and that the performers need to know early if they will be admitted to the country. This restriction was **eased** in the bill approved last week.

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