

The Good, the Best and the Border

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Body

Hey, bud, you want some fake identification? It's not hard to find. In Texas, one forger provided whole ID packets, including Social Security card and birth certificate, for \$75. If that's all an illegal alien needs to stay in this country, no wonder there are so many of them. Indeed, there's such a wave of false papers that some people now suggest surrendering to the illegal tide.

Editorial calls on House of Representatives to pass Simpson-Mazzoli immigration reform measure; says measure has shortcomings, but it is good first step in halting tide of illegal aliens (M)

Sure, they say, Congress may finally be on the verge of passing the big Simpson-Mazzoli immigration reform bill that's meant to put the United States back in control of its borders. But with all the forgeries, the argument goes, it can't work, so what's the use?

It's an infuriating attitude, so defeatist as to be suspect. Tax evasion is increasing as more and more cash changes hands in the underground economy. Does that mean the Internal Revenue Service should stop trying to enforce Title 26 of the U.S. Code? More people have been running red lights in New York City. Does that mean the police should stop giving out tickets?

Of course not, and to suggest that the nation should surrender to illegal immigration suggests a defeatism motivated by special, selfish interest. On immigration, there's plenty of that, ranging from growers who want cheap labor to Hispanic organizations that want easy entry.

If the United States is serious about controlling the borders, the Simpson-Mazzoli bill - already passed overwhelmingly by the Senate - is an essential starting point. There's no measure before the new session of Congress that more deserves public attention or prompt enactment by the House.

If controlling the borders is so important, why doesn't the Government enforce present laws against illegal entry? Heaven knows it tries. The Border Patrol is now up to 2,800 agents, an increase of 20 percent in just two years. But the task remains hopeless because what's on the books is more loophole than law. Yes, it is illegal for undocumented individuals to enter the country and to take jobs here. But it is *not* illegal for an employer to hire them. So they keep flooding in, eager to take their chances as long as they can earn wages that are princely by comparison with wages at home in Mexico or elsewhere. Until Congress closes the loophole, what the United States displays at its borders is not a big stick but a big wink. The Simpson-Mazzoli bill would not, by itself, create a big stick. It would be far stronger if it included a reasonable, built-in system of worker identification instead of leaving that to be dealt with in three years. But that's a perfectionist objection. Immigration is a subject torn by ideological contradictions and special interests. For the bill to have gotten this far has required repeated compromise. Even if enacted, Simpson-Mazzoli could still be torpedoed. It could not work without sufficient enforcement funds or without further steps, like an identification system. But unless it is passed, nothing constructive is imaginable. Simpson-Mazzoli is not the best possible immigration reform, yet it remains a good bill and a necessary one. Now it's up to the House leadership to insure that, after 19 months of debate, the measure

does not falter on the last lap. To permit the best to become the enemy of the good can only insure victory for the worst.

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