

ILLEGAL IMMIGRANT LICENSE BILL STALLS OUT

San Jose Mercury News (California)

July 7, 1999 Wednesday MORNING FINAL EDITION

Copyright 1999 San Jose Mercury News All Rights Reserved

Section: FRONT; Pg. 1A

Length: 954 words

Byline: KEN MCLAUGHLIN, Mercury News Staff Writer

Dateline: SACRAMENTO

Body

A **bill** that would have allowed **illegal immigrants** to obtain California driver's **licenses** died Tuesday in a deeply divided Senate committee.

The measure, sponsored by Assemblyman Gil Cedillo, D-Los Angeles, would have repealed state Sen. Al Alquist's 1993 legislation that requires **license** applicants to prove they're in the country legally. Alquist, a retired San Jose Democrat, had claimed that **illegal immigrants** were using driver's **licenses** as "breeder documents" to establish residency and apply for welfare.

Cedillo and backers of his **bill**, AB 1463, argued Tuesday that the issue was traffic safety, not **illegal** immigration. Permitting undocumented **immigrants** to drive on California roads without being road-tested, **licensed** and insured is poor public policy, they argued.

But the **bill** initially garnered only five votes on the 12-member Transportation Committee.

"It dies," a visibly disappointed Cedillo, who represents a predominantly Asian and Latino district, said minutes after the 6-5 vote.

Cedillo later picked up a vote from Sen. Tom Hayden, a liberal Santa Monica Democrat, after he arrived late at the hearing. But frenetic attempts to persuade at least one senator to change his or her "no" vote failed, and the committee adjourned late Tuesday.

Cedillo's aide, David Galaviz, said Cedillo was working Tuesday night to ensure that the Senate later this summer can still consider a scaled-back version of his **bill** that would allow **illegal immigrants** with pending immigration petitions to get **licenses**.

Tuesday's vote was viewed in Sacramento as a key measure of political sentiment over the once-incendiary issue of **illegal** immigration -- an issue that has simmered since Proposition 187 passed overwhelmingly in November 1994. That landmark initiative, which last year was declared unconstitutional by a federal judge, would have prevented **illegal immigrants** from attending public schools and receiving most public benefits with the exception of emergency medical care.

Watered down

Cedillo's **bill** was virtually identical to a measure by Sen. Hilda Solis, D-El Monte. But Solis' **bill** was watered down by the transportation panel after she told fellow senators that her main concern was protecting free trade and the interests of Japanese business people, who have complained of the long time it takes for the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service to clear their **license** applications.

ILLEGAL IMMIGRANT LICENSE BILL STALLS OUT

Although a half-dozen states have laws similar to the Alquist law, only California has established an elaborate system that makes it virtually impossible to present fraudulent documents. The Department of Motor Vehicles uses INS databases to check immigration status at its local offices while applicants for licenses and state ID cards wait in line.

In most cases, the applicants have their immigration status verified while they wait in line. But in almost 200,000 cases a year, copies of immigration documents are sent to the INS for "secondary verification," sometimes causing months of delay in obtaining a permanent license.

The Solis bill, SB 371, which easily cleared the Democratic-controlled Senate, still requires driver's license applicants to present documents proving they were born in the United States, are naturalized citizens or are legal residents or visitors. But under a legislative compromise, the DMV would not require secondary verification unless it believed that the submitted documents were fraudulent.

Gov. Gray Davis, a Proposition 187 opponent who has tiptoed around the issue of appealing the judge's 187 decision, has not taken a position on either the Solis or the Cedillo bill.

Figueroa: facing reality

Senators who voted for Cedillo's bill Tuesday, including Sen. Jackie Speier, D-San Mateo, and Sen. Liz Figueroa, D-Fremont, argued that the vote simply acknowledged reality -- that the state of California has little power to control the tens of thousands of illegal immigrants who still come to the state annually despite Proposition 187 and despite 1996 federal legislation aimed at getting tough on illegal immigrants.

"One of the realities is that they are here and the state of California doesn't have the power to remove them," said Sen. Kevin Murray, D-Culver City.

"Do you want your daughter on a bicycle on the same street with someone who didn't study the traffic laws and take the driving test?" Murray asked Rick Oltman of the Federation for American Immigration Reform, which strongly opposed Cedillo's bill.

Oltman, a San Rafael resident who led the Northern California fight to pass Proposition 187, said he supported licensing and car-insurance requirements for all Californians -- but only those here legally.

"Giving illegal aliens driver's licenses will only make enforcement of our immigrant laws more difficult," said Oltman, contending that it would make it harder to detect them.

Denying licenses to illegal immigrants, Oltman argued, is "one more tool we can use to prevent them from taking jobs from legal residents."

Sen. Betty Karnette, a Long Beach Democrat who chairs the transportation panel, seemed to sum up the concerns of many on her panel when she announced that she was voting "no" -- but then expressed frustration at the larger issues involved. "We ought to be talking to the federal government about (guest worker) permits" for Latino workers now working here illegally, she said. Such a program would allow people to work and get driver's licenses, she added. "There ought to be some way of doing that," Karnette said.

She congratulated Cedillo on making a "good case" for his bill, but said most people in her district would simply object to giving a legal document to illegal immigrants.

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Subject: IMMIGRATION (91%); ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS (90%); DEATHS & OBITUARIES (90%); DRIVERS

ILLEGAL IMMIGRANT LICENSE BILL STALLS OUT

LICENSES (90%); LEGISLATIVE BODIES (90%); **LICENSES** & PERMITS (90%); US DEMOCRATIC PARTY (90%); US STATE IMMIGRATION LAW (78%); PASSPORTS & VISAS (78%); CITIZENSHIP (78%); HISPANIC AMERICANS (78%); MIGRATION ISSUES (78%); LEGISLATION (78%); PUBLIC POLICY (78%); US STATE GOVERNMENT (78%); LIBERALISM (76%); US FEDERAL GOVERNMENT (75%); ROAD TRANSPORTATION SAFETY (75%); JUDGES (71%); PETITIONS (68%)

Company: SANTA MONICA PLACE (55%)

Industry: DRIVERS **LICENSES** (90%); ROAD TRANSPORTATION SAFETY (75%)

Person: HILDA L SOLIS (58%)

Geographic: LOS ANGELES, CA, USA (79%); SACRAMENTO, CA, USA (79%); SAN JOSE, CA, USA (78%); CALIFORNIA, USA (94%); UNITED STATES (79%)

Load-Date: October 25, 2002

End of Document