

HOUSE KEEPS U.S. DOORS OPEN

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Body

WASHINGTON The House last night passed a sweeping measure aimed at curbing the influx of illegal aliens but rejected a crackdown on legal immigration.

The bill the first immigration law overhaul in a decade cleared the House 333 to 87.

"This bill will crack down hard on illegal immigration while insuring that America remains a refuge for legal immigrants," said Rep. Nita Lowey (D-Westchester).

The bill aims to get tough on illegals by:

Hiring 5,000 new border patrol agents over five years.

Barring illegal aliens from applying for some forms of welfare on behalf of their U.S.-born children.

Giving state and local cops authority to detain illegal aliens and hand them over to the Immigration and Naturalization Service.

Increasing penalties for alien smuggling and document fraud.

Setting up an 800-number in five states for employers to insure job applicants are in the U.S. legally.

Republicans and moderate Democrats mostly supported the bill. Liberal Democrats opposed it.

Rep. Jose Serrano (D-Bronx) voted against it because of a provision that would let states bar illegal aliens from public schools an idea White House spokesman Mike McCurry called "nutty."

The crackdown would have a big impact on New York City, which receives about one-third of the roughly 300,000 illegals who enter the United States annually.

But lawmakers turned back, 238 to 183, a bid to slash legal immigration by 30% from 800,000 a year to about 700,000 for the next five years and 560,000 after that.

Immigration advocates said the cutbacks on legal immigration would have devastated tens of thousands of New Yorkers who have been on waiting lists to legally come to the U.S. for a decade or more.

President Clinton backs the bill, but it is unclear whether he will have the chance to sign it. A similar measure is stalled in the Senate, and Majority Leader Bob Dole (R-Kan.) has not said when he will bring it up.

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The vote against new limits on legal entry was a setback to Dole's and House Speaker Newt Gingrich's strategy to force Clinton into a series of legislative vetoes to highlight their policy differences.

Every New York City House member except Rep. Susan Molinari (R-S.I.) voted against cutting back legal immigration, but the delegation split on final passage.

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