

Panel to urge reductions in immigration

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Body

The national Commission on **Immigration** Reform Wednesday will recommend significantly **reducing** legal **immigration** to the USA, mainly by emphasizing nuclear family reunification and shutting the door to other close relatives.

The proposed changes -- the most sweeping in about 30 years -- have set off alarm bells among the throng of **immigration** interest groups, which know how much influence the commission has with Congress and the White House.

"From what was supposed to be a thoughtful, blue-ribbon commission . . . (the recommendations) are stunning," says Cecilia Munoz of the National Council of La Raza, an immigrant rights group. "This is steeped in politics."

If the recommendations were to be adopted by Congress -- which is not assured -- a major effect would be to **reduce** "chain migration," in which extended family members, their spouses and their children can **immigrate** because of their relationship to someone already here.

Based on a USA TODAY analysis of 1993 legal **immigration** data, nearly a quarter of that year's 880,000 legal immigrants couldn't have come under the recommendations.

Although the recommendations maintain the basic framework of the current **immigration** system -- which puts top priority on family-based **immigration** -- the proposals will provoke nearly every faction:

-- **Immigration** of siblings, adult children age 21 and older, and some unskilled workers would be eliminated, a move that would have kept out nearly 140,000 people in 1993.

-- Overall **immigration** would decrease to about 700,000 a year for a transition period, then hold at 550,000 a year. In 1994, overall **immigration** was 800,000.

-- Parents of U.S. citizens could not **immigrate** until they or their children first purchase health insurance for them. In 1993, 62,428 people **immigrated** in the parents category.

-- Slots for skilled foreign workers would drop to 100,000 a year from 147,000. Fees would be imposed to discourage hiring foreigners.

-- Refugee admissions would be **reduced** to 50,000 a year. In 1993, more than 115,000 refugees became legal immigrants.

"The commission . . . is recommending some major reallocation of priorities and emphases," says Susan Martin, executive director of the nine-member, bipartisan **panel**.

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Refugee advocates, who already complain the USA doesn't accept enough displaced people, will not be happy about the refugee reduction.

And powerful U.S. corporations that hire skilled foreign workers will balk at paying a big fee to continue doing so.

"It takes out the flexibility needed to be responsive to the needs of the economy," says Warren Leiden, director of the American Immigration Lawyers Association and the commission's lone dissenter.

But the elimination of family categories sparks the most outrage. "Your children don't stop being your children just because they turn 21," says Munoz, who also notes the health insurance requirement for parents would reserve immigration for the rich.

Others protest eliminating the sibling category -- even though the wait is now about 30 years. The commission argues a category that makes people wait that long ought to be axed.

Instead, the commission recommendations are aimed at speeding admission of spouses and minor children of citizens and legal immigrants. Now, those admissions take years because of an enormous backlog.

Still, some critics complain the commission has been unduly influenced by public anger over illegal immigration.

What Congress will do is unclear. But the commission is expected to provide some political cover for a tough issue.

"It's not a bad first step . . . given the difficulties in dealing with an issue dominated by special interests," says Dan Stein of the Federation for American Immigration Reform, a pro-restrictions group.

There is little consensus in Congress:

-- "The commission has great credibility," says Rep. Lamar Smith, R-Texas, chairman of the House immigration subcommittee.

-- "People are fed up with all this nonsense of all these people coming," says Rep. Bob Stump, R-Ariz.

"We don't have too many immigrants," House Speaker Newt Gingrich said recently. "We can absorb the current numbers if we solve the illegal immigration problem."

Contributing: Peter Eisler

Who's what

-- U.S. citizen: Native-born or naturalized person. -- Legal permanent resident: Immigrant legally entitled to live in U.S. -- Family-sponsored immigration: Immigrant admitted on basis of kinship to citizen or legal permanent resident. -- Employment-sponsored immigration: Immigrant is admitted for job after employer certifies no Americans available. -- Refugee: Immigrant admitted based on a well-founded fear of persecution -- Commission on Immigration Reform: Bipartisan panel created by Congress in 1990

Plan eliminates preference for family

Recommendations by the Commission on Immigration Reform would cut back on legal immigration to the United States. The proposal, which must be approved by Congress, would limit the number of immigrants largely by eliminating preferences for such family members as siblings and children over age 21. In addition, it also would permanently stop immigration by some unskilled workers. Using 1993 statistics, the most recent available, here is a USA TODAY analysis of the number of legal immigrants who would not be able to get in if the immigration proposals were to become law:

1993 immigrants	880,014
Excluded under	203,639

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proposal

1 - Does not include immigrants granted amnesty under a 1986 law. Tab or bars

Excluded under the proposal

Immigrant siblings, their spouses and children	62,264
Unmarried adult children of legal permanent residents	29,704
Married adult children of citizens and their spouses, children	23,385

Unmarried adult children of citizens and their spouses, children 12,819

Unskilled workers	9,967
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Countries most affected by change Number and percentage that would have been excluded in 1993 if the proposals had been in effect:

	Immigrants	Excluded	Percentage
Mexico	109,027	13,949	12.8%
Dominican Republic	44,886	13,716	30.6%
Philippines	63,189	13,710	21.7%
India	40,021	11,707	29.3%
China	65,552	8,858	13.5%
Poland	27,729	5,335	19.2%
Jamaica	16,969	5,203	30.7%
Vietnam	59,613	4,539	7.6%
El Salvador	25,517	4,471	17.5%
Hong Kong	14,026	4,421	31.5%

Decade on record pace The 3.7 million legal immigrants arriving from 1991 through 1993 has the USA on pace for a record high decade of immigration. Legal immigration by decade:

Year	Immigrants
1821-1830	143,439
1831-1840	599,125
1841-1850	1,713,251
1851-1860	2,598,214
1861-1870	2,314,824
1871-1880	2,812,191
1881-1890	5,246,613
1891-1900	3,687,564
1901-1910	8,795,386
1911-1920	5,735,811
1921-1930	4,107,209
1931-1940	528,431
1941-1950	1,035,039
1951-1960	2,515,479
1961-1970	3,321,677

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1971-1980	4,493,314
1981-1990	7,338,062
1991-1993	3,705,436

Notes

THE NATION; See info box at end of text

Graphic

GRAPHIC, b/w, Kevin Rechin, USA TODAY, Source: Analysis of Immigration and Naturalization Service data by Paul Overberg, USA TODAY (Pie chart, bar graph)

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