

U.S. Moves to Tighten Security on Borders; In Wake of Terrorist Attacks, Congress and INS Are Changing Their Priorities

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Body

Congress and federal agencies are **moving** to strengthen **border security** in the **wake** of the Sept. 11 **terrorist attacks**, with steps such as new technology to identify arriving foreign visitors and a planned tripling of guards on the Canadian **border**.

Bigger **changes** appear likely. At congressional hearings over the past two weeks, legislators have promised to provide more money for the Immigration and Naturalization Service and called on the agency to implement plans to track foreign visitors and students that have languished for years.

Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.), chairman of the Senate Judiciary immigration subcommittee and a longtime champion of pro-immigrant policies, signaled the **change** in tone yesterday when he told a hearing: "Clearly, the screening of foreign nationals who seek entry into the **U.S.** must be improved."

Kennedy and Sen. Sam Brownback (R-Kan.) are expected to announce legislation in the next few days that would fund systems to track foreign students and visitors and require additional training for **U.S.** officers who issue visas.

Until Sept. 11, the **U.S.** immigration system had focused less on terrorism than on barring foreigners seeking to work here illegally. With demand for workers rising during the economic boom of the late 1990s, the government was considering expanding the number of temporary immigrants allowed into the country.

But the FBI's conclusion that 19 foreign nationals carried out the deadly airplane hijackings in New York, Washington and Pennsylvania has transformed the politics of immigration. The hijackers all apparently were issued non-immigrant visas at **U.S.** consulates. At least three stayed in this country beyond their visa deadlines, according to the INS.

Steps taken recently to **tighten** the immigration system include:

* Anti-terrorism bills passed last week by the House and Senate calling for tripling the scant **Border** Patrol forces on the Canadian **border** and spending \$ 50 million more on technology to help them.

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* A reexamination by the State Department of six countries in the "visa waiver" program, which allows citizens from 29 nations to enter the United States without review by a U.S. consulate abroad for a visa. Mary A. Ryan, the assistant secretary for consular affairs, did not identify the six countries "of concern" to the State Department.

* New access for immigration inspectors to a State Department database that includes photos of all visa applicants. The information helps detect passport or visa fraud. INS Commissioner James Ziglar said INS inspectors would have access to the database within three months.

Experts said the steps are only the beginning of what are likely to be far-reaching changes in an attempt to prevent terrorists from abusing the immigration system.

"This clearly represents a refocusing of attention on border security," said Mark Krikorian, executive director of the Washington-based Center for Immigration Studies, which favors reduced immigration. "What I find dismaying is that Congress acknowledged the importance of border security in fighting terrorism in the 1996 legislation" aimed at tightening the immigration system after the bomb attack on the World Trade Center. "Then that emphasis was allowed to languish," he added.

Demetrios G. Papademetriou, co-director of the Washington-based Migration Policy Institute, said changes to the immigration system could take years to carry out because they may involve training new employees and negotiating treaties.

But he said moves such as tripling the 334-strong INS contingent on the northern border were important symbolically.

"It tells people . . . that our people on the Hill, our leaders, are determined to do better," he said.

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