

LOCAL GROUPS AIMING AT WELFARE-REFORM BILLS IMMIGRANT ADVOCATES URGE END TO SCAPEGOATING

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Body

The message itself was not new: In times of economic slump, immigrants become scapegoats.

But Bay Area immigration advocates called on their supporters Thursday to press Washington for an end to the practice, as Congress attempts to reconcile twin welfare-reform bills viewed by some as part of a new wave of scapegoating.

At a news conference at the Korean Resource Center in Santa Clara, Asian-American and Hispanic immigration advocates hailed President Clinton's recent denunciation of provisions denying federal benefits to legal immigrants - including, in some cases, naturalized citizens. Separate House and Senate welfare-reform bills await reconciliation in a joint congressional conference committee.

In an Oct. 18 letter to the joint conference committee, Clinton said the administration "strongly opposes the Senate provision that would discriminate against U.S. citizens by denying benefits to legal immigrants even after they became naturalized citizens."

Sunmee Eom, director of the Korean Resource Center, said: "In these days of demagoguery and scapegoating, it is encouraging and heart-warming to hear the voice of reason from the nation's highest office."

And yet, Richard Konda of the Asian Law Alliance added that even though Clinton said "both the House and Senate bills go too far in cutting benefits to legal immigrants," the president's priorities are still not completely clear as he prepares to seek a welfare-reform compromise he can support.

The Thursday call to arms was part of a national effort by immigration advocates to stop legislation they view as hostile to immigrants. In the wake of two full-page ads in the Washington Post, signed by more than 350 organizations, immigration supporters are now calling for a mass letter-writing and faxing effort to members of Congress and the president.

Some speakers at the news conference said immigrants are being blamed unfairly for economic hardships caused by corporate downsizing, increased reliance on temporary workers and other national economic trends.

Notes

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