

IMMIGRATION PANEL SET TO URGE CLOSING THE DOOR ON RELATIVES

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Body

The Commission on Immigration Reform is expected to recommend to Congress within the next few weeks that it significantly reduce the number of legal immigrants allowed to enter the United States.

Sources say the commission is planning to recommend the elimination of immigration categories that allow newly naturalized U.S. citizens to bring in their married adult children as well as brothers and sisters.

That would reduce the number of legal immigrants by about 100,000 each year.

In addition, the commission, headed by former Rep. Barbara Jordan, D-Texas, is considering trying to reduce by as much as half the approximately 135, 000 political refugees and their relatives who are admitted each year.

Jordan, a longtime civil rights leader, was appointed to her post by President Bill Clinton.

Each year, about 800,000 legal immigrants are admitted to the United States in a variety of categories, including political refugees.

That is the equivalent of adding a city the size of San Francisco to the U.S. population each year.

Close to 70 percent are granted residence on the basis of a family relationship, and the remainder get in based on employment and other special skills.

Last fall, the commission issued a report on illegal immigration that provoked a chorus of protest from advocacy groups.

Critics said its proposal for a national computerized employment registry ran the risk of violating the civil rights of minority workers.

The commission's latest work is expected to draw similar fire and underscores the extent to which the new Republican majority is driving the immigration agenda.

Appointed jointly by Congress and Clinton, the commission was supposed to come up with a report on legal immigration in September 1997.

But at the nudging of Sen. Alan Simpson, R-Wyo., and Rep. Lamar Smith, R-Texas, who head immigration subcommittees, the commission has moved up its timetable.

Republicans on the nine-member commission include Harold Ezell, a Ronald Reagan-era Immigration and Naturalization Service regional commissioner and a leader in the campaign to pass Proposition 187 in California.

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Ezell reportedly played a key role in persuading other commission members to go along with the proposal to limit legal migration.

Jordan was determined to forge a consensus, even if that meant coming up with proposals that at first seem at odds with her previous unqualified support for legal immigration.

The commission met behind closed doors for three days recently and approved a series of near-unanimous recommendations that would limit the number of relatives of both U.S. citizens and permanent residents who could be admitted to the United States.

At the same time, the commission is expected to declare that the main focus of "family reunification" in immigration policy should be on reunifying the nuclear family, as opposed to extended family networks.

To that end, sources indicate that the commission may propose that minor children and spouses of permanent residents who are not yet American citizens be admitted at an accelerated pace to deal with the backlog of nearly 1.2 million applications in that category.

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