

IMMIGRATION BILLS OFFER TO SLOW FLOW

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Body

THE **IMMIGRATION** reform legislation that is working its way through Congress represents a culmination of a process that began two years ago in supermarket parking lots and shopping malls all across California, and resulted in passage of Proposition 187.

These **bills offer** mechanisms for more effective control of illegal **immigration** as well as changes in legal **immigration**, which is actually a bigger problem.

The two **bills**, introduced by Rep. Lamar Smith, R-Texas, and Sen. Alan Simpson, R-Wyo., would begin to rectify some of the policy failures that have propelled illegal and legal **immigration** to unprecedented levels. These **bills** would institute the kind of common-sense reforms that the vast majority of Americans support and would go a long way toward defusing **immigration** as a hot button issue.

To combat illegal **immigration**, the government would institute a secure identification procedure that would allow employers and benefit-providers to verify instantly whether an applicant is entitled to work or collect benefits. By giving law-abiding employers an effective means of screening out unlawful workers, the primary magnet that draws illegal immigrants to this country would be sharply curtailed.

Even more important in the long run is the Smith/Simpson proposal to reduce legal **immigration**. Thirty years of steadily increasing admissions, now running nearly 1 million people a year, is having a greater impact on our country than our failure to control our borders. The Smith/Simpson reforms would begin to reverse that trend by instituting a modest 25 percent reduction in overall numbers. Moreover, they would relieve the pressure on the system by ending **immigration** preferences for extended family members.

To the extent that we have **immigration** at all, it must be limited to the nuclear family. The promise that entire extended families can be reunited in this country is unrealistic and denies the nation control over the selection process. The legislation would also require immigrants' sponsors to assume financial responsibility for these newcomers, not the American taxpayer.

Had Congress made these changes to our **immigration** policy when the rumblings of popular discontent began, a referendum like Proposition 187 never would have been necessary. Belatedly, Congress is beginning to defuse an issue that has been complicated by years of neglect.

Notes

Dan Stein is executive director of the Federation for **Immigration** Reform in Washington. He wrote this article for the Los Angeles Times.

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