

A Bill That Earned Its Doubters

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Body

Compromise is incessantly praised, and it has produced the proposed immigration legislation. But compromise is the mother of complexity, which, regarding immigration, virtually guarantees -- as the public understands -- weak enforcement and noncompliance.

Although the compromise was announced the day the Census Bureau reported that there now are 100 million nonwhites in America, Americans are skeptical about the legislation, but not because they have suddenly succumbed to nativism. Rather, the public has slowly come to the conclusion that the government cannot be trusted to mean what it says about immigration.

In 1986, when there probably were 3 million to 5 million illegal immigrants, Americans accepted an amnesty because they were promised that border control would promptly follow. Today the 12 million illegal immigrants, 60 percent of whom have been here five or more years, are as numerous as Pennsylvanians; 44 states have populations smaller than 12 million. Deporting the 12 million would require police resources and methods from which the nation would rightly flinch. So, why not leave bad enough alone?

Concentrate on border control and on workplace enforcement facilitated by a biometric identification card issued to immigrants who are or will arrive here legally. Treat the problem of the 12 million with benign neglect. Their children born here are American citizens; the parents of these children will pass away.

Under current immigration policies, America is importing another underclass, one "with the potential to expand indefinitely," according to Heather Mac Donald of the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research. To sentimentalists who cling to "the myth of the redeeming power of Hispanic family values, the Hispanic work ethic, and Hispanic virtue," she says:

From 1990 to 2004, Hispanics accounted for 92 percent of the increase in poor people. Only 53 percent of Hispanics earn high school diplomas, the lowest among American ethnic groups. Half of all children born to Hispanic Americans in 2005 were born out of wedlock -- a reliable predictor of social pathologies.

The legislation supposedly would shift policy from emphasizing family unification to emphasizing economic criteria (skills) when setting eligibility for immigrants. Critics say this will sunder families. But the sundering has happened;

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it was done by illegal immigrants who left family members behind and are free to reunite with their families where they left them.

Anyway, the supposed shift from emphasizing family relations -- the emphasis that results in "chain migration" -- to economic merit may be diluted to nothingness. It is highly suspicious that there was a rush -- fortunately stymied -- to pass this legislation through both houses and get it to conference, where the majority of participants will be Democrats eager to court Hispanic votes.

Some Democrats argue that liberalism's teetering achievement, the welfare state, requires liberal immigration policies. The argument is: Today there are only 3.3 workers for every retiree. In January, the first of 77 million baby boomers begin to retire. By the time they have retired, in 2030, there will be 2.2 workers for every retiree -- but only if the workforce is replenished by 900,000 immigrants a year.

On Monday, however, Robert Rector of the Heritage Foundation stunned some senators who heard his argument that continuing, under family-based immigration, to import a low-skilled population will cost the welfare state far more than the immigrants' contributions to the economy and government. He argued that low-skilled immigrants are costly to the welfare state at every point in their life cycle and are very costly when elderly. Just the 9 million to 10 million adults already here illegally will, if given amnesty, cost an average of \$300,000 -- cumulatively, more than \$2.5 trillion -- in various entitlements (Social Security, food stamps, Medicaid, housing, etc.) over 30 years.

To those who say border control is impossible -- often these are the same people who said better policing could not substantially reduce crime, until it did -- one answer is: It took just 34 months for the Manhattan Project to progress from the creation of the town of Oak Ridge in the Tennessee wilderness to the atomic explosion at Alamogordo, N.M. That is what America accomplishes when it is serious.

In an attempt to anesthetize people who sensibly say "border control and workplace enforcement first," important provisions of the legislation would supposedly be "triggered" only when control of the border is "certified" by the president. But in what looks like a parody of the Washington mentality, certification would be triggered not by border control but by the hiring of border control agents and other spending. So, the supposedly hardheaded aspects of the legislation actually rest on the delusion that spending equals the achievement of the intention behind the spending. By that assumption, we have long since tranquilized and democratized Iraq.

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