

COSTS OF IMMIGRATION REFORM, MEASURED AND UNKNOWN, DROWNED 1984 BILL

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Body

The efforts of three successive Administrations to reform the nation's immigration policy collapsed last week on the critical question of cost.

The White House insisted on a billion-dollar spending limit as a condition for accepting the latest bill, which would have been the most sweeping reform of immigration policy in three decades. Key Congressional backers of the measure, sponsored by Senator Alan K. Simpson, Republican of Arizona, and Romano L. Mazzoli, Democrat of Kentucky, wanted a flexible spending limit.

Implicit in the debate and the stalemate that left the bill to die when Congress adjourned was a recognition that the cost of immigration reform would be high, although no one knew how high.

Article focuses on possible social and economic impact of Congressional failure to reach compromise on immigration reform legislation (M)

Without reform, though, the presence of what may be six million illegal aliens in this country exacts an economic and social toll. No one knows how high that toll is, either, or how much of it is offset by the advantages society gains from a low-wage work force that cannot receive benefits available to citizens.

Cost Grows With Arrivals

There is no question that the growing number of illegal aliens living here puts a strain on some social services or that the cost grows with each new arrival.

Adding to the bill are the costs created by the rising number of illegal aliens whose United States-born children are entitled to all the benefits given any other citizen.

Those who watch immigration patterns agree that while earlier waves of illegal arrivals were predominantly single males, there is an increasing tendency among such men to stay here and marry, as well as a growing incidence of illegal immigration by entire families, the man often arriving first and the wife and children joining him after he has found a job and a place to live. Because they are most often young, these families continue to grow.

Last Resort for Care

They are much in evidence at Los Angeles County-University of Southern California Medical Center, a dull, worn facility near downtown Los Angeles that from the outside looks more like a factory than a general hospital.

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For tens of thousands of poor people in southern California, it is the last resort for medical care, and increasingly its patients are illegal aliens. They do to the medical center in great numbers, and their unpaid **bills cost** the county \$99.8 million last year.

Those **bills** are part of the burden borne by Federal, state and local governments, which provide anything from financial aid to emergency medical care to education to routine city services, such as police and fire protection, not only for citizens but also for illegal aliens, some of whom obtain services fraudulently.

Estimate by Federal Agency

The **Immigration** and Naturalization Service estimates that Federal, state and local governments probably lose \$1.26 billion annually for each million illegal residents.

That calculation assumes a tax contribution of \$995 million from each million illegal aliens, offset by a total **cost** to government of just under \$2.25 billion. This **cost** is based on an analysis last fall of **cost** data in job displacement, education, unemployment, welfare, health and crime.

It is a matter of unusual complexity, and the illegal aliens themselves are only a part of the equation.

On a recent evening inside the Los Angeles medical center, for example, a very young woman who gave her name as Ana Teresa Cruz jumped up regularly to chase her 20-month-old son, Roberto, a rambunctious infant dappled with the chocolate bar he had been eating.

Her Child Is a Citizen

Mrs. Cruz is from Tijuana and has been in the United States illegally for two years. Roberto was born in the Los Angeles hospital, and regardless of his parents' status he is a United States citizen.

Last year 18,813 children, one of every 200 of the estimated 3.6 million births nationwide, were born to illegal aliens in three public hospitals in Los Angeles County alone. The births **cost** Los Angeles County \$20.1 million in unpaid maternity **bills**.

And while children born here to illegal aliens are costly because they are entitled to all the benefits of citizenship, they present a special moral and legal problem. Deporting their parents would mean either breaking up families or in effect deporting children who are American citizens.

Charts Under Different Names

Mrs. Cruz says that because Roberto is a citizen - she says it with a clear note of pride - she does not fear seeking medical care for him. But not for herself. "I am well," she says.

Those who do seek care create medical as well as fiscal problems because they often use false names. "We've got patients floating around here with three and four charts under different names," said Dr. John Gunning, associate chairman and chief of gynecology at another of the county's hospitals, Harbor-U.C.L.A.

Some Hispanic organizations, bolstered by several studies in the late 1970's, have suggested that illegal aliens in this country put as much into the economy as they take out. What is lost at the state and local level, the argument goes, is offset by a tax windfall to the Federal Government in payroll deductions the illegal residents never recoup because they are afraid to file for refunds or benefits.

Later studies, including the 1983 **immigration** service finding, dispute that argument, suggesting that illegal aliens avail themselves of public services to a greater degree than was previously believed.

Small Displacement Role Seen

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A study for the Urban Institute published this year concluded that a typical illegal Mexican family in southern California absorbed \$2,000 more in various services than it paid in taxes, and cited low wages as a reason. It also said illegal aliens actually displaced few, if any, American workers.

In general, programs supported wholly or in part by the Federal Government deny benefits to illegal aliens, although some states provide benefits, generally such aid as hospital insurance and workers' compensation, but not unemployment insurance.

A 1982 survey by the Federation for American Immigration Reform, a private group pushing for immigration control, reported that illegal aliens were not eligible for general assistance in most states, but were in Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, North Carolina, Ohio, Washington and Wisconsin.

Catherine C. Randlett, director of the State of New Jersey's Washington office, said that state regulations specifically made illegal aliens eligible for benefits from New Jersey's General Assistance program and the Federal Government's Aid to Families with Dependent Children program, half of whose costs are paid by the state.

All Estimates Are Guesses

Any estimate of how many illegal aliens use those programs, she said, is only "a guess." Using a ballpark figure of 74,000 illegal aliens in the state, and assuming that 5 percent got assistance at a per capita cost of \$2,800 a year, she said, "We're dealing with a dollar figure of not less than \$10.4 million."

Another question is the cost of education. The Supreme Court has ruled that all children living in the United States, regardless of citizenship, have the right to free public education. Officials estimate that this now costs \$85 million a year in Texas alone.

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