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Immigration Chronicles

Blogging the issue with the Chronicle staff

March 05, 2008

Immigration reform returns to the Senate

For almost nine months, we haven't heard a peep out of Congress on immigration reform. No bills. No debate.

After the bruising battle over a Senate bill that ultimately failed last summer, it seems like no one wanted to go there.

But that may change today. The Los Angeles Times reports that Senate Republicans will propose some tough measures on the enforcement front. Maybe the members of the country's most exclusive club got tired of sitting on the sidelines as state legislatures enact law after law to curb illegal immigration.

Here's an excerpt from an [LA Times story](#):

WASHINGTON -- Senate Republicans are set to announce today the hardest-hitting package of immigration enforcement measures seen yet -- one that would require jail time for illegal immigrants caught crossing the border, make it harder for them to open bank accounts and compel them to communicate in English when dealing with federal agencies.

Most of the bills stand little chance of being debated in the Democratic-controlled Congress. But the move by some of the Senate's leading Republicans underscores how potent the immigration issue remains, particularly in a presidential election year.

The bills give Republicans a way to put pressure on the Democratic and Republican presidential candidates to take a tougher stance on immigration. They also reflect a shift toward harsher immigration rhetoric and legislative proposals from both parties since Congress failed to pass a comprehensive overhaul in 2007.

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The package -- an enforcement smorgasbord assembled by at least eight lawmakers -- consists of 11 bills, but it could expand to as many as 14. Some elements echo House bills, but others go beyond House proposals.

One would discourage states from issuing driver's licenses to illegal immigrants by docking 10% of highway funding from states that continue to do so.

Another would extend the presence of the National Guard on the border, and a third would end language assistance at federal agencies and the voting booth for people with limited English ability.

Posted by Mizanur Rahman at [11:37 AM](#) | [Comments \(19\)](#)

March 04, 2008

Illegal immigrants living with target on their backs

One of the hardest places to live as an illegal immigrant right now is Prince William County in Virginia. This week, a new law took effect in the county of 357,000 residents that allows police to check immigration status of people suspected of breaking the law -- even minor traffic violations. Immigrant advocates worry that Hispanics will be ethnically profiled as a result of the law.

So now illegal immigrants are being told to avoid any missteps: don't speed, jaywalk or so much as spit on the sidewalk. An excerpt from [a Washington Post story](#) on the new ordinance:

Work-van drivers signaled long before their turns to avoid being pulled over for a traffic violation. Day laborers skipped their early morning coffee at 7-Eleven, and merengue tunes played to empty tables at Latino lunch counters across Prince William County yesterday.

It was the first day of a county ordinance that allows police to check people's immigration status for even minor legal infractions.

Police officials pledged to enforce the law fairly and to not stop and question individuals based on their racial or ethnic appearance, but many Hispanic residents said they feared they would be stopped without reason and deported for such violations as driving without a valid license or having a broken taillight.

"Already the rumors are starting," said Rene Cabrera, a legal resident from El Salvador who works at a market in Manassas. "My friend saw four patrol cars outside a shopping mall and thought it was a raid. Instead of going to the store, he stayed in his car and drove away. I really worry this can create chaos."

Immigrant advocate groups, speaking at a community meeting Sunday in Woodbridge and on local Spanish-language radio

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stations, have been advising immigrants without legal papers to keep a low profile and obey all traffic rules. If stopped by police, the groups said, they should be polite and show some identification but otherwise remain silent until they can see a lawyer.

Posted by Mizanur Rahman at [11:16 AM](#) | [Comments \(11\)](#)

March 03, 2008

How illegal immigration fizzled as a wedge issue

We were wrong.

In the heat of last summer, so many pundits, politicians and journalists swore that illegal immigration was destined to dominate the looming presidential race. It was a no-brainer wedge issue for the primaries and 2008 general election -- akin to how politicians exploited crime and welfare in the 1980s.

In June, the winds of opposition stirred by conservatives, talk show hosts and anti-amnesty groups blew up the Senate immigration reform bill. Presidential candidates such as Mitt Romney furiously jumped on the tough-on-illegal-immigration bandwagon by August.

But the firestorm fizzled. Exit polls in primary after primary show that immigration failed to mobilize large blocs of voters. What happened to deflate the doomsday scenario?

[An analysis in The New York Times](#) by David Leonhardt this weekend dissects how illegal immigration didn't deliver. Here are a few points raised in the article:

Immigration has a fantastically complicated political history in the United States. It has produced enough populist anger to elect Know Nothing mayors of Chicago, Philadelphia, Washington and San Francisco, all in the 1850s and, more recently, to help Lou Dobbs reinvent his television career and become a best-selling author. But when national politicians have tried to seize on such anger, they have usually failed -- and failed quickly. "While immigration has always roiled large sections of the electorate," said Eric Rauchway, a historian at the University of California, Davis, "it has never been the basis for a national election, one way or the other."

Mr. Rauchway ... argues that the ultimate failure of anti-immigrant politics is part of a larger failure of class-based politics in the United States. Running against the rich -- or the poor -- has rarely worked in this country. Instead, immigrant-bashing has been most successful when it tapped into broader racial fears, as it did in both the 1850s and the 1920s. Notably, the economy was booming in the '20s.

"As it becomes less and less acceptable to be racist," Mr.

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Rauchway said, "immigration is not going to be as politically effective."

Posted by Mizanur Rahman at [04:45 PM](#) | [Comments \(7\)](#)

March 01, 2008

Harris County voters weigh in on immigration

A [hot-off-the-presses poll in Harris County](#) offers a fresh glimpse into local attitudes about immigration.

The key finding? In Harris County, 48 percent of voters favor providing illegal immigrants a chance to earn citizenship, while 42 percent oppose the idea, according to a Zogby International survey of 604 voters conducted this week for the Houston Chronicle.

This finding is on par or just below most national surveys. A Los Angeles Times/Bloomberg Poll in December showed that 60 percent of the country supported a path to citizenship for illegal immigrants.

The Harris County poll also reveals that while immigration isn't lighting a fire under voters, it is a hotter issue than the old mainstays of education, taxes and abortion.

About 11 percent of likely voters ranked immigration as their most important issue. The economy, the war in Iraq and health care scored higher.

Meanwhile, the poll says 50 percent of likely voters in the Democratic presidential primary support Sen. Barack Obama compared to 41 percent for Sen. Hillary Clinton. And it's no contest between Sen. John McCain, the likely Republican presidential nominee, and former Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee.

So what does all this mean? A hard reality confronts deportation disciples and critics of so-called amnesty plans: The three people likely to be the next president all support eventual citizenship for the undocumented -- as does most of America.

So could immigration reform be reborn in the next president's term? If I was a betting man, I'd say yes. Federal inaction has grown absurdly pronounced as every week another state law crops up to tackle the problem.

But will reform pass this time? After all, current president George Bush fought for the immigration bill last summer in a Democrat-controlled Congress -- and it still died.

Posted by Mizanur Rahman at [07:47 AM](#) | [Comments \(19\)](#)

February 28, 2008

New Q&A on the FBI Name Check

The Department of Homeland Security has posted a [Q&A](#) that explains its recent decision to allow green card applicants to become lawful permanent residents without passing the FBI Name Check portion of the background check.

The policy change was designed to address a mounting backlog of green card applicants who have met other requirements for permanent residence and have passed an automated fingerprint check, yet are waiting more than six months for FBI "name check" clearance. The agency estimates 47,000 people will be affected.

Critics raised concerns about issuing green cards without completing the full name checks, but agency officials said they can revoke the lawful permanent resident status if they find reason for suspicion in the full investigation.

Posted by Susan Carroll at [02:18 PM](#) | [Comments \(2\)](#)
