

# So Much for Promises...

Selected Quotes from Congressional Sponsors of the 1965 Immigration Act

By JOSEPH E. FALLON

Since the 1965 Immigration Act went into effect, more than 30 million immigrants, most from non-European, Third World countries have poured into the United States. Today, most of the U.S. population growth is due to these immigrants, and their offspring. These results contradict promises made to American citizens by the Act's Congressional Sponsors, as revealed in their own words.

## Senator Edward M. Kennedy (D-MA)

“Out of deference to the critics, I want to comment on...what the bill will not do. First, our cities will not be flooded with a million immigrants annually. Under the proposed bill, the present level of immigration remains substantially the same... Secondly, the ethnic mix of this country will not be upset... Contrary to the charges in some quarters, S.500 will not inundate America with immigrants from any one country or area, or the most populated and economically deprived nations of Africa and Asia. In the final analysis, the ethnic pattern of immigration under the proposed measure is not expected to change as sharply as the critics seem to think. Thirdly, the bill will not permit the entry of subversive persons, criminals, illiterates, or those with contagious disease or serious mental illness.

As I noted a moment ago, no immigrant visa will be issued to a person who is likely to become a public charge...the charges I have mentioned are highly emotional, irrational, and with little foundation

in fact. They are out of line with the obligations of responsible citizenship. They breed hate of our heritage.” (Senate Part 1, Book 1, pp. 1-3)

## Senator Robert F. Kennedy (D-NY)

“In fact, the distribution of limited quota immigration can have no significant effect on the ethnic balance of the United States.... Total quota immigration is now 156,782; under the proposed bill, it would rise to 164,482. Even if all these immigrants came from Italy, for example, the net effect would be to increase the number of Italo-Americans by one-tenth of 1 percent of our population this year, and less as our population

increases. Americans of Italian extraction now constitute about 4 percent of our population; at this rate, considering our own natural increase, it would take until the year 2000 to increase that proportion to 6 percent. Of course, S.500 would make no such radical change. Immigration from any single country would be limited to 10 percent of the total—16,500—with the possible exception of the two countries now sending more than that number, Great Britain and Germany. But the extreme case should set to rest any fears that this bill will change the ethnic, political, or economic makeup of the United States...[w]e bar immigration by those individuals who would compete for jobs for which the supply of labor is adequate for

the demand...we bar immigration by individuals who have demonstrated that they do not hold such allegiance [to our fundamental precepts of political freedom and democratic government].... If it is true



**Sen. Robert F. Kennedy reassured his constituents that the 1965 Act would “have no significant effect on the ethnic balance of the United States.”**

that those from northern Europe, as individuals, can make greater contributions to this country than can others, then this legislation will bring them here. If the legislation does not bring them here, then the assumptions on which defenders of the present system rely are wholly false...[S.500] will facilitate the entry of skilled specialists...the level of immigration now proposed is far less than that thought 'assimilable' by the most restrictionist Congress [1924] in our history.... As far as the quota system, it [S.500] increases it about 9,000 and as far as a practical matter, it increases it about 50,000. It is not a large number." (Senate Part 1, Book 2, pp.216-218, 226, 242)

### Senator Philip Hart (D-MI)

"...the notion was created that somehow or another, 190 million [the population of the U.S. in 1965] is going to be swallowed up. None of us would want that, this bill does not seek to do it and the bill could not do it." (Senate Part 1, Book 1, p.29)

### Senator Hiram Fong (D-HI)

"...the people who have built up America, Anglo-Saxons, and the northern peoples of Europe, are not discriminated against in this bill... the people from that part of the world [the Asia-Pacific Triangle] probably will never reach 1 percent of the [U.S.] population.... Our cultural pattern will never be changed as far as America is concerned.... It will become more cosmopolitan but still there is that fundamental adherence to European culture.... We feel those people [from northern Europe] who have been preferred in former immigration bills would still be treated fairly...one of the reasons why the United States was attacked, on December 7, 1941, was because of these exclusionary laws [the 1924 Immigration Act] which had fomented so much bad feeling between the peoples of Japan and the United States." (Senate Part 1, Book 1, pp.72, 119, 120, 144)

### Senator Hugh Scott (R-PA)

"I do not think it [S.500] amounts to a serious increase in the number of persons admitted...I have read the statements of the Malthusian pessimists, and they be right, of course, but I doubt if this bill will really be the cause of crowding the present Americans out of the 50 states...I do not believe an increase of 66,000 opens the door wide." (Senate Part 1, Book 1, p.136)

### Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach

"This bill is not designed to increase or accelerate the number of newcomers permitted to come to America... this bill would retain all the present security and health safeguards of the present law... the overall effect of this bill on employment would, first of all, be negligible, and second, that such effect as might be felt would not be harmful, but beneficial. The actual net increase in total immigration under this bill would be about 60,000. Those immigrants who seek employment are estimated at a maximum of 24,000. Our present labor force, however, is 77 million. Statistically or practically, we are talking about an infinitesimal amount; 24,000 is about three one-hundredths of 1 percent of 77 million a good part of even these 24,000 additional workers would not even be competitors for jobs held or needed by Americans. I would expect very little change in the immigration from the Western Hemisphere." (Senate Part 1, Book 1, pp.8, 13-14, 31)



**Former Att. Gen. Nicholas Katzenbach argued that the 1965 Act was "not designed to accelerate the number of newcomers permitted to come to America."**

### Secretary of State Dean Rusk

"...the maximum allotment of numbers in any one fiscal year could not exceed the sum of all immigration quotas in effect on the date of enactment of the bill, roughly 166,000. Immigration now comes in limited volume and includes a relatively high proportion of older people and persons of high skill

and training. The significance of immigration for the United States now depends less on the number than on the quality of the immigrants.... Under present circumstances our country has a rare opportunity to draw migrants of high intelligence and ability from abroad.... I think the average immigration from the Western Hemisphere over the past 5 years has been about 125,000 a year. We do not anticipate a large increase in those nonquota applications.... The opportunities here in the United States, the opportunities which attract immigration, are the more sophisticated opportunities, for the educated, for the trained, for the industrial worker, for the technician, for those who can enter into a more sophisticated part in our life than they could if they came in without skills and without any training " (Senate Part 1, Book 1, pp. 48, 50, 52)

**Secretary of Labor W. Willard Wirtz**

"[S.500] would promote the admission of individuals with qualifications and occupations needed in the United States without disturbing the domestic employment situation." (Senate Part 1, Book 1, p. 84)

**Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare Anthony J. Cerebrezze**

"With the exception of the provisions relating to epilepsy and certain mental conditions this legislation does not alter the qualitative standards for immigration which prevent the entry of those whom we can, in justice and in logic, exclude. It preserves our national security and our domestic welfare; it continues to exclude subversives; it retains the provisions of existing law which makes aliens who become public charges deportable." (Senate Part 12, Book 2, p. 334)

**Senator Claiborne Pell (R-RI)**

"[S.500] sets the limit of how many people we

think are desirable to keep the mix I may be wrong. Maybe there will be a huge surge from India or a huge surge from Africa, but I would tend to doubt it." (Senate Part 2, Book 1, pp. 561,563)

**Senator Harrison A. Williams (D-NJ)**

"...S.500 does not open the gates to all aliens applying for immigration. Any bar to true assimilation is ours, not theirs [the immigrants]. It is how we welcome to our country, not how much they [the immigrants] want to be welcomed." (Senate Part 2, Book 1, pp. 567, 569)

**Senator Thomas H. Kuchel (D-CA)**

"Under the proposed bill, the total number of immigrants remains approximately the same...." (Senate Part 2, Book 1, p. 576)

**Senator E. L. (Bob) Bartlett (D-AK)**

"The bill does not seek to increase to any great extent the annual number of new immigrants we admit." (Senate Part 2, Book 3, p. 851)

**Senator Daniel K. Inouye (D-HI)**

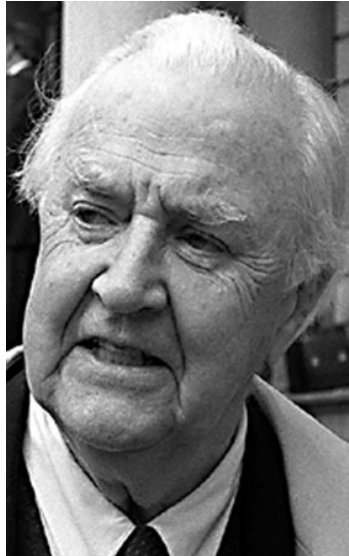
"...while the national origins rule will be eliminated in establishing quotas for foreign countries, this does not mean that the bill would permit a floodtide of new immigrants into this country. As a matter of fact, the total number of potential immigrants would not be changed very much." (Senate Part 2, Book 3, p. 853)

**Senator Eugene J. McCarthy (D-MN)**

"The proposed legislation would not greatly increase the number of immigrants...." (Senate Part 2, Book 3, 854)

**Senator Pat McNamara (D-MI)**

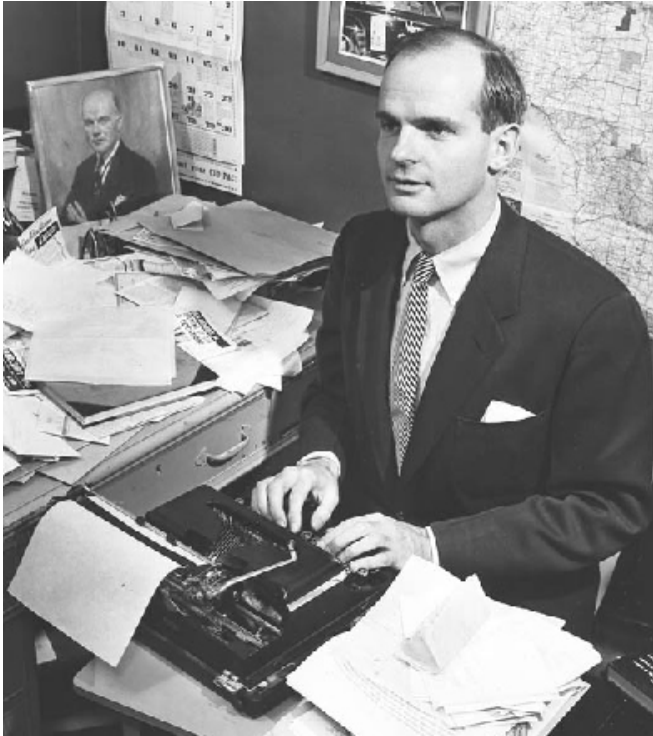
"Total quota numbers available will be only slightly increased." (Senate Part 2, Book 3, p. 855)



**Former Sen. Eugene McCarthy stated that the "proposed legislation would not greatly increase the number of immigrants." Over time McCarthy embraced immigration restrictions.**

**Senator Frank E. Moss (D-UT)**

“I emphasize that this bill would not attempt to make any drastic changes in our overall immigration numbers.” (Senate Part 2, Book 3, p. 856)



**Sen. William Proxmire claimed that the 1965 Act would neither “substantially increase the total number of immgrants” nor “reduce the security safeguards” that screen out undesirables.**

**Senator William Proxmire (D-WI)**

“S.500 does not let down the bars completely. It would not substantially increase the total number of immigrants to be admitted to the United States. It would not reduce the security safeguards for keeping out political undesirable[s]. It would not diminish the requirements designed to keep out persons likely to become public charges.” (Senate Part 2, Book 3, p. 857)

**Nicholas S. Limperis, national chairman, AHEP [Greek-American organization] Immigration Legislative Committee**

“This bill emphasizes not primarily increased immigration but equality of opportunity for all people to reach this Promised Land.” (Senate Part 2, Book 1, p. 381)

**Joseph A. L. Errigo, acting chairman, Sons of Italy National Committee**

“S.500 does not repeal the McCarran-Walter Act [immigration act of 1952]. It merely amends it. The overall picture outside of the amendment provided by S.500 will remain more or less the same.” (Senate Part 2, Book 1, p. 416)

**Mike M. Masaoka, Washington representative, Japanese American Citizens League**

“ the 1924 exclusion act against just the Japanese contributed to the downfall of the democratic liberal elements in Japan and allowed the militarists, the jingoists, the imperialists to take over and lead Japan on the dreadful path of World War II... none of us should take for granted that S.500 is the ultimate in immigration law let us recognize even this law cannot wipe out the widespread favoritism for Europeans, which has existed in our law.” (Senate Part 2, Book 2, pp. 628, 629) “Let’s make no mistake about this. This legislation is in the national interests of the United States and not necessarily for other countries....” (HR Book 1, p. 222)

**Jack Wong Sing, Director, West Coast District, National Chinese Welfare Council**

“Let it not be said that Chinese immigration would be opened. Under the pending proposals, any increase in volume of immigration of the Chinese would still be limited....” (Senate Part 2, Book 2, p. 727)

**James B. Carey, President, International Union of Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America (IUE) and Secy-Treas. of the AFL-CIO Industrial Union Dept.**

“S.500 will do little or nothing to add to unemployment. We estimate that by the fifth year of operation only about 24,000 quota immigrants will have joined the labor force each year. At that time, we will have a labor force of 86 million. The newcomers will constitute three-thousandths of 1 percent of that group of workers we can expect that a good number of these immigrants will bring badly needed skills to this country.” (Senate Part 2, Book 1, p. 470)

**Secretary of State Dean Rusk**

“This bill [HR 2580] itself draws some distinctions in favor of, gives preferences to certain types of people in terms of talent and training. It is not one which others have objected to. We haven’t had any indication of disagreement on that from abroad, from any government, certainly.... We are dealing here with a level of immigration that is fully within our ability to absorb, and our needs as a Nation to receive...we do not get the impression that 3 billion people are all at the starting line, waiting to take off to come to this country, just as soon as the bill is passed.” (HR Book 1, pp. 97, 105, 105)



**Former Secretary of State Dean Rusk argued that the 1965 Act “gives preferences to certain types of people in terms of training and talent.”**

**Representative Spark M. Matsunaga (D-HI)**

“The administration bill is a revolutionary one, but it is not as revolutionary as some have claimed or believe it to be. It would change the basis for allotting immigrant visas but it does not provide for an overwhelming increase in immigration as some people seem to fear. It provides for a quota increase of less than 8,000. Actual immigration, counting nonquota and quota immigrants, would be increased around 50,000 or roughly 17 percent over current average annual immigration of around 300,000. This is certainly not a throwing open of the floodgates.” (HR Book 1, p. 200)

**Representative Richard S. Schweiker (R-PA)**

“The administration bill favors nations of Latin America and North America. It favors nations of northern Europe.” (HR Book 1, p. 204)

**Representative John D. Dingell (D-MI)**

“The new bill makes no change whatsoever in the safeguards of our present immigration laws which prohibit the admission of Communists, other subversives, security risks, narcotic addicts, and persons with criminal record. It provides controls to protect our domestic labor market.” (HR Book 2, p. 407)

**Representative Richard L. Ottinger (D-NY)**

“This bill emphasizes needed skills whereas existing legislation virtually ignores them.” (HR Book 2, p. 417)

**Representative Patsy T. Mink (D-HI)**

“...this bill is but a step in the right direction. It is estimated that in the total 5-year period 679,663 of the 828,805 persons entering the United States will come from Europe.” (HR Book 2, p. 420) ■



**Rep. John Dingell stated that the 1965 “makes no change whatsoever in the safeguards of our present immigration laws....”**

**References**

Source of the above Senate quotes: Hearings Before the Subcommittee on Immigration and Naturalization, Committee of the Judiciary, United States Senate, Eight-Ninth Congress, First Session, on S.500 to Amend the Immigration and Naturalization Act, and For Other Purposes. Part 1 February/March; Part 2 March/June/July/August 1965 Congressional Information Service, Inc.

Source of House of Representative (HR) quotes: Hearing Before Subcommittee No. 1, Committee of the Judiciary, House of Representatives, Eight-Ninth Congress, First Session on H.R. 2580 “To Amend the Immigration and Naturalization Act and For Other Purposes,” March/April/May/June 1965. Congressional Information Service, Inc.