

Congress Set to Act: Reality Intrudes On Immigration Issue

By Don Feder

Congress is close to doing something sensible about the alien inundation, and immigration Pollyannas are panicking. Writing in the September 29 *Wall Street Journal*, Paul Gigot did a Chicken Little number on the Simpson-Smith immigration bill.

The columnist claims the bill's provision for an identity-verification bank, to curtail the employment of illegal aliens, is a menace to civil liberties. Republicans would establish an intrusive bureaucracy to catch those "guilty only of crossing the border to find work."

It sounds so trivial — like littering or loitering. How can we deny desperate folks the opportunity for a livelihood? None of this can be squared with "GOP rhetoric about lean government," Gigot grumbles.

And you always thought that controlling our borders was an essential operation of national government. Perhaps congressional devolutions will return the Border Patrol's functions to the states.

Facts are such pesky critters, always nipping at the heels of dogmas. It is an article of faith for Chamber of Commerce conservatives, libertarians and the invisible-hand society that immigration — illegal or not — is at the worst benign and probably confers untold benefits on this nation.

But reality intrudes on comfortable mythology. In late August, the Census Bureau issued a bombshell report, "The Foreign Born Population: 1994." Last year, its numbers reached a postwar high of 8.7 percent of the population, double the proportion of immigrants in 1970. In California, 25 percent of the population is foreign-born.

These numbers are augmented by about one million a year. By the middle of the next century, the foreign born could account for 14 percent of all residing within our borders.

Big deal, the Gigots reply. Nation of immigrants, melting pot, Lady Liberty lifting her lamp to huddled masses and all that.

The melting pot is boiling over. Look at the demographics of the alien influx. Immigrants of the '90s are twice as likely as the native born to lack high-school education. Forget their indifference to learning our language, history and customs; many are qualified only for the most menial positions.

Consequently, they have twice the rate of welfare dependency of the general population (5.7 percent against 2.9 percent). Among Asian immigrant families, 23 percent are collecting AFDC and 13.6 percent SSI. It's rare that Gigot and company deign to notice this doleful effect of open immigration.

Besides those supported with government checks, other huddled masses have found sanctuary in our penal system. In just five years (1988 to 1993), the proportion of aliens in federal prisons rose from 21.1 percent to 25.4 percent. It is conservatively estimated that there are now nearly a half million immigrants in prison, on probation or on parole.

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Immigration fuels the population explosion, with corresponding social costs — pollution and overcrowding chief among them. Absent porous borders, the Census Bureau estimates our population would stabilize at around 260 million by 2050. Under the current drift, it will swell to at least 390 million and could reach half a billion. Welcome to America on the Ganges.

And while we're packed like proverbial sardines, we can contemplate all of our irritating differences that are aggravated by unrestricted immigration.

New immigrants are altering America's racial/ ethnic composition. The last great immigration wave prior to 1965 (1901 to 1920) was 86 percent European.

Of those who arrived between 1980 and 1993, 82 percent are Hispanic or Asian. Blacks from the Caribbean and Latin America immediately qualify for affirmative-action preferences, as will their children and grandchildren.

No beautiful mosaic this, but a multicultural fraying of the social fabric. By 2020, whites will comprise less than 60 percent of the population of the nine largest states. Would that race and ethnicity didn't count, and we could all live together harmoniously. Liberalism's penchant to make everything a color issue has precluded that.

Riots, cultural separatism, a racialized justice system and demands for reparations will be among the more pleasant aspects of our growing Balkanization.

In its June 26 issue, *National Review* — a certified champion of lean government policy — editorialized that "open immigration is a highly interventionist government policy."

Here, deliberate inaction sets off a chain reaction. It transfers wealth, reorders our existence and changes society over majority protests. ■