

Associate editor Wayne Lutton summarized for us a new report of the costs of illegal immigration in San Diego County, California.

Study: Illegal Immigrants Cost San Diego Millions

By Wayne Lutton

Illegal immigrants cost state and local governments in San Diego County a total of \$206,411,969 in 1991, according to a report released in August by the Auditor General of California.

The costs were divided into four major areas:

● Criminal Justice,	\$105,754,121
● Education,	\$60,666,755
● Health Services	\$26,619,920
● Social Services,	\$13,371,173

The San Diego border sector accounts for an estimated 50 percent of the illegal entries into the United States. The number of illegal immigrants who cross the border has been increasing every year since the Immigration Reform & Control Act of 1986 (IRCA) became law.

During the 1991-92 fiscal year, 600,000 illegal aliens were apprehended in the San Diego area. Immigration and Naturalization Service officials estimate that they catch one-in-three or as few as one-in-five who cross illegally. Other sources suggest the ratio may be only one-in-ten. From this, it would appear that there were 1.8 million to 5 or 6 million illegal crossings during the past fiscal year. While this number does not reflect an individual who may enter the United States more than once, it does indicate the level of activity taking place on the border in the San Diego area.

The two-year study was prepared at the request of the California Senate Select Committee on Border Issues by Professors Louis Rea and Richard Parker, of the School of Public Administration and Urban Studies at San Diego State University. Based on state population estimates, they found that around 200,000 illegal immigrants reside permanently in San Diego County — about 5 percent of California's total illegal immigrant population. Extrapolating from the figures for San Diego County, the report suggests that illegals cost state and local governments in California a minimum of \$3 billion annually (this understates the total cost to taxpayers, since many social welfare programs are funded, at least in part, by the Federal government).

The study provides a profile of illegal aliens residing in the San Diego area. Their median age is 25.5 years. Most come from Central Mexico, especially Mexico City. Nearly 75 percent have less than a 6th grade education. Over 71 percent have children (the mean number being 2.5). Thirty percent of the illegals admitted that they work with a forged Social Security card, and half of them have done so for more than five years.

Acting Auditor General Kurt Sjoberg pointed out that the findings are tentative and likely *underestimate* total costs, since a number of agencies involved undercounted their costs. For example, only 9 of the 22 county hospitals cooperated with the team that prepared the study.

The report confirms that the taxes paid by illegal immigrants are small compared to the amount of public services which they consume. Illegals comprise at least 9 percent of the population of San Diego County. They account for the following statistics:

- 18.3% of those arrested for felonies in the City of San Diego and 12.5% of those arrested for felonies in the County are illegals. According to law enforcement agencies, this understates the problem, since many suspected illegals provide forged identification documents. The major types of felonies they commit are burglary (21.6%), theft (26%), and drug offenses (26.2%). Illegals' involvement in drug usage has increased at a substantially higher rate than the population at large. Of those illegal aliens convicted of felonies, only one-third actually received jail or prison time.
- Illegals are eligible for restricted Medi-Cal benefits — the research team determined that they consume 18.3% of the services provided in community clinics and public health facilities.
- It has been estimated that 16% of the state's public school attendees are foreign-born immigrants. The annual cost per student is \$4,328. Most qualify as Limited English Proficient (LEP) Students. The total cost incurred by taxpayers is not included in the report's findings.

- Among the Social Service costs are Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), provided to children of illegals who are born in the United States. Technically, it is the citizen-child who qualifies for the program, but the child's family actually receives the payment and is supported, at least in part, by these funds. Currently, citizen-children of illegals living in San Diego County are receiving \$23,365,200 annually.

State Senator William Craven (R-Oceanside), chairman of the Select Committee on Border Issues, emphasized that the costs of illegal immigration "outweigh the contributions of the undocumented. The impacts are even greater than anticipated. The conservative estimated net costs of services to the undocumented in San Diego County alone are enough to cover the 1991 budget deficits of the county of San Diego and all 18 cities in the region. ... The magnitude of the impact must be determined and addressed." He has promised that further hearings will be conducted on the issue. ■

[Copies of report No. C-126, *A Fiscal Impact Analysis of Undocumented Immigrants Residing in San Diego County* are available for \$7.00 per copy. Contact the Office of the Auditor General, 600 "J" Street, Suite 300, Sacramento, CA 95814; or telephone (916) 445-0255.]