

*Problems associated with illegal immigration are not mere abstractions to people living in California. Barbara McCarthy is the editor of Eleven Ninety-Nine, published by the Stamp Out Crime Council (P.O. Box 17451, San Diego, CA 92177).*

# Memo From the San Diego Border

By Barbara McCarthy

The search this year for an Attorney General who has a clean record and has never hired illegal aliens may serve as an introduction to the problems this country has with illegal immigration — problems more familiar to those of us who live near the border.

Among the many responsibilities of the Justice Department, headed by the Attorney General, is that of running the Immigration and Naturalization Service as well as the Border Patrol. The Border Patrol is charged with keeping anyone from entering the country *between* official ports of entry. Each year the Border Patrol intercepts well over a million people trying to enter illegally, nearly half of those in the San Diego area. Of the total 1,000,000-plus, about 95 percent try to cross our southern border, 3 percent come in from the north, and 2 percent are apprehended in the southeast. They are returned to their countries of origin, either voluntarily or through legal process. It is estimated that at least one person makes successful entry for each one picked up, but it is quite possible that two or three get through — they can't count the ones they don't catch. There are far too few Border Patrol personnel to catch and return all of them.

The other part of the Attorney General's responsibility as regards immigration is the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). One of this agency's roles is to staff ports of entry, to verify that those who enter the country are doing so legally. These may be citizens returning from trips to other countries, or visitors with permission to enter. Customs, a separate agency under the Treasury Department, also staffs ports of entry. Agents of the INS and Customs are cross-trained in both areas of responsibility.

The INS plays many roles. In addition to staffing ports of entry, agents examine people trying to adjust their status in this country; they deal with relatives of current immigrants who also want to enter the U.S.; they handle the detention and deportation of criminal aliens, maintaining (in our area) a 450-bed detention facility in El Centro, CA. They are involved in investigations of criminal activities by aliens — anti-fraud, anti-smuggling, alien gangs. In this area they also have a facility to care for women and children who have been found crossing illegally but have for some reason lost contact with the paid smuggler and the rest of their party. Some children are found wandering all alone in the immediate area of the border. They are turned over to the Casa de San Juan

which even has a school for the youngsters. Since the passage of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), which gave amnesty to 3,000,000 illegals in exchange for forbidding employers to hire illegals, the INS is charged with locating employers who hire illegals and following through with appropriate legal action — which certainly adds significantly to its duties.

There simply are not enough agents to perform all these tasks, and the Congress seems neither to know nor to care.

## Why We Should Do Better

Every country has the right to control its borders and to decide who may enter and who may not. Each country attempts to do that. Many countries have no problems with illegal entry because nobody wants to go there — sometimes because of grinding poverty with no hope of improvement, sometimes because of terrorist governments. The favorite destination for entry, legal and illegal, is the United States. We accept more immigrants, refugees and asylees than all the other countries of the world combined.

It is the responsibility of our government to control our borders, to see that only those with permission enter. Article IV, Section 4 of the Constitution states that the federal government shall protect the states from invasion. In truth, we are invaded daily and the federal government falls flat on its face and will not deal with the problem. The INS is given the wherewithal to do no more than make a gesture in its attempt to exert control. There are those who say that since our southern border is 2,000 miles long we would have to have agents shoulder to shoulder along that entire length to prevent illegal entry. This is utter nonsense. Most of those 2,000 miles are desert or rough mountain terrain almost impossible to cross on foot, or even with vehicles. There are approximately 200 miles of border area that are relatively easy to cross, primarily in the San Diego (CA) and El Paso (TX) areas. Enough personnel with proper equipment would make a great difference along those 200 miles.

## Who Are the Illegals?

Just who are these people who enter illegally? Every year, in the San Diego sector alone, people from 60 to 70 countries are intercepted. The great majority are from Mexico with a fair sprinkling from Central America. Others are from the rest of the world. Most

are escaping poverty in their home countries and believe they will fare much better here. The backlog for legal entry is lengthy and they are unwilling to wait their turn.

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Having once made successful entry, some illegal aliens get work in the agricultural fields of San Diego and points north and east. This tends to be the picture most people have of what happens to them. Actually, a very small percentage take such work. Others find jobs in factories, in the construction business, in the service sector, or, as in the case of the Attorney General nominees, in private homes as nannies, maids, gardeners, etc. Every employer who hires them has violated IRCA, of course. There are a great many employers who not only break the law but exploit their illegal employees badly. They rarely pay the going wage. There are usually no taxes paid for them, no income tax withheld, no Social Security tax paid, no medical coverage of any kind. When these people become ill and need medical care, who pays for it? In one way or another we all do. They use public hospitals for care. Many women arrive well along in their pregnancies for the express purpose of delivering in this country. Their babies then automatically become U.S. citizens and are entitled to all the welfare programs that citizenship allows. Representative Elton Gallegly (R-CA) has introduced legislation which would make a number of changes, including removing automatic citizenship for the children of non-citizens born here.

Some illegals enter this country with direct intent to commit crimes. Close to the border area, auto theft is a favored activity. The vehicles tend to be either sold to chop shops on this side of the border, or taken south and sold as is. Many illegals are involved in the drug traffic. Substantial numbers will body-carry a few pounds of marijuana or cocaine to be delivered north of the border. They do this for their smugglers who will accept it as payment for guiding them across the border.

Others are involved in much larger drug transactions and will attempt to drive a large load across the border and make a substantial profit. Many have done this successfully, using their vehicles to knock down an old fence or to drive through the gap left by a previous dealer. A new and tougher but incomplete fence which runs for several miles is beginning to make a change. Entry now tends to be

where the fence is missing, and it is far easier for the Border Patrol to intercept loads when they are channeled by the fence into observable areas, and to increase the amounts of drugs seized — marijuana, cocaine, and even heroin.

Other illegals are not involved in obvious crime, but more subtle fraud. They are quite willing to try to use for their own benefit the system this country has devised to take care of its poor. Mexico and many other countries have far less adequate systems to provide housing, food, medical care, and other services for their needy citizens. We can only guess how many illegals are using billions of tax dollars worth of services to which they are not entitled.

One way of getting into the system is to purchase fake documents, available on the streets in many areas, including Los Angeles, for about \$50, which purport to show that the bearer has a right to work here, is eligible for food stamps or general assistance, etc. Illegals have managed to pick up Social Security numbers, including duplicating legitimate ones belonging to citizens.

Many of the young people, especially in Los Angeles but increasingly in other areas, belong to dangerous and violent street gangs and commit many crimes, including homicide. During the LA riots last spring, a substantial number of young illegal looters was rounded up and sent back to Mexico.

Hard figures about crime are extremely difficult to obtain for many reasons. Most politicians are terrified of dealing with the issue lest they be called "racist." Many agencies are forbidden to try to discover whether papers presented to them are valid, and sometimes to even ask for documentation. On occasion, those working at agencies where they could ask a few questions refuse to do so — they feel sorry for poor people; immigration status is of no concern.

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Consider the following figures which are probably on the low side because of lack of reporting or record-keeping:

- A study in San Diego County showed that the estimated 200,000 undocumented living here cost a net \$146 million per year just in criminal justice, health and welfare expenses.
- A Los Angeles County study found that at least 11 percent of the criminals in their county jails are illegal, deportable aliens with a cost to taxpayers of some \$75.1 million per year.
- Illegal alien minors in California who have

broken not only federal law by illegal entry, but state penal codes, are being held in California Youth Authority facilities at a cost of \$31,000 per youngster, for a total cost of \$20,150,000 in FY 1991.

- New York State has so many illegals in prisons that the state corrections commissioner announced that it cost the state's taxpayers over \$100 million a year.

The net cost to Los Angeles county for illegal aliens and their children for FY 1991/92 was \$400 million. In addition, illegal aliens and their children cost LA County schools \$1.03 billion during that same time period. In 1991, there were 28,829 babies born to illegal aliens in LA County hospitals, which is 66 percent of total births. As of June 1992, about 150,000 children of undocumented parents were on welfare. Of the first 6,000 people arrested during the 1992 riots, one-third were illegal aliens. Forty percent of illegal aliens released from the Los Angeles County jail were rearrested within one year.

It is geography, of course, that causes California to bear a disproportionate share of these costs. Yet, to a lesser extent, every part of the country is affected. The impact of uncontrolled illegal immigration falls on other border states, especially Texas. Florida has its own problems, and such cities as Detroit, Chicago, Denver and Kansas City have experienced problems with illegal alien activity and the high costs involved. When the federal government picks up any of these bills, it is felt by all of the taxpayers.

There is currently some discussion about combining Customs and the INS, since both deal with our borders. This could be effective or it could be a disaster, depending on several factors, not the least of which is: how knowledgeable will the people in our nation's capital be — those who would be in charge? Would the move simply increase the size of the bureaucracy which seems to be composed, for the most part, of people who have only microscopic levels of information about the overall problem?

Finally, it might be well to point out that some of the loudest voices to be heard on the topic of our borders are those of self-anointed "leaders" who, for their own reasons (often financial), want open borders and insist that illegals have a right to everything they can get from government. (There is a growing movement to give non-citizens, including illegals, the right to vote in all elections.) Let us be aware that, as the polls clearly show, these leaders do not speak even for most legal immigrants — including both the newcomers who came recently and did everything according to the law, as well as those whose families have been in this country for generations. These law-abiding migrants are also adamantly in favor of controlled borders. ■