



Law Failed to Stem Illegal Immigration, Panel Says

By PETER T. KILBORN,
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With the Clinton Administration still smarting from the problems with the child-care arrangements of Zoe Baird and Judge Kimba M. Wood, a new Government report contends that illegal immigration continues unchecked and is making a mockery of a 1986 law that was intended to curb it.

Foreigners who seek low-wage jobs -- working in homes, cleaning office buildings, doing the heavy lifting on construction crews, sewing in garment shops, bringing in the nation's fruit and vegetable harvests -- are rarely competing with Americans for those jobs.

Both employers and their unauthorized workers run some risk, but the risk is small because enforcement is difficult. Workers have easy access to fraudulent work documents, and the Government has been reluctant or unable to track down most violators.

Next week the Commission on Agricultural Workers, created under the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, will submit to Congress the most thorough study yet of the immigration law. Established to appease farmers who feared that the law would cut off their labor supply, the commission only examined the law's effect on farming. But its findings of widespread illegal immigration apply to all parts of the economy that attract unauthorized foreign workers. 'Oversupply of Farm Labor'

After six years of study, the commission's 12 members concluded: "Rather than a stabilization of the labor supply, there is a general oversupply of farm labor nationwide. Unauthorized immigrants continue to cross the southern border in large numbers."

The commission suggests tough new controls on illegal immigration, including development of a fraud-proof identification document for immigrants. Senator Alan K. Simpson, a Wyoming Republican who was an author of the 1986 law, has long espoused such a document, but it raises the hackles of those who regard the document as an invasion of privacy.

Others say the Government could do more to improve the wages and working conditions of menial jobs so that more Americans would be willing to apply for them. The commission says wages and working conditions will improve if the law really stems the supply of foreign workers.

Both the commission and various immigration experts say the steady influx of unauthorized workers worsens working conditions for everyone. "You get low pay for household work, poor conditions and people being taken advantage of," said George High, executive director of the Center for Immigration Studies, a small Washington-based research group. 'Systematic Effort' Needed

Demetrios G. Papademetriou, a scholar at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and the Labor Department's immigration policy director in the Bush

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Administration, said, "What we don't do is make a systematic effort to control immigration."

Mr. Papademetriou, whom commission officials consulted about their report, said it was impossible to know how many immigrants had illegally entered the United States. But he said the most plausible estimate was 3.5 million, of whom 500,000 were farm workers and 350,000 were domestic workers. He said the domestic workers were concentrated in New York City and northern New Jersey, and in Los Angeles, Chicago, Miami and Houston.

The Internal Revenue Service estimates that two million Americans employ domestic workers -- cleaning house, caring for children, tending gardens -- and that only 250,000 of those workers meet all the requirements of the immigration and tax laws.

"It's massive in Washington, D.C.," said Michael Maggio, an immigration lawyer here. "They're working in the homes of our lawyers, our journalists and our government officials."

At the same time, the nation's principal enforcement agency, the Immigration and Naturalization Service, largely ignores violations in farming and domestic work because of insufficient staff. Instead, the agency concentrates on factories and work sites where it stands a better chance of finding large concentrations of workers who lack the proper documents. Searches Called Inefficient

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