

New immigration rules make it harder for poor to bring relatives

By Patrick J. McDonnell=(c) 1997, Los Angeles Times

Moving to ensure that new legal immigrants do not end up on welfare, federal authorities on Monday unveiled stringent and unprecedented new guidelines that will make it much more difficult for low-income people to bring in

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Attorney with CLIN

relatives from abroad.

The revisions mark a landmark shift in U.S. immigration policy, experts say, chipping away at the current doctrine of family unification.

The changes, mandated by Congress' sweeping 1996 overhaul of the nation's welfare and immigration laws, impose the first-

ever financial screening requirement on U.S. residents who petition to bring in spouses, children, and other relatives.

Most sponsors will now have to show household income at least 25 percent above the poverty level; under that calculation, the minimum income for sponsorship would be \$20,062 for a family of four.

In addition, the new Immigration and Naturalization Service regulations for the first time make immigrants' sponsors, usually close relatives, legally liable for supporting those who come here- an obligation that could last a lifetime. So-called "deadbeat sponsors" may henceforth face lawsuits from government and private aid agencies- or even from the relatives they brought to the United States- if they fail to provide basic levels of support.

Behind the crackdown is the widespread but sometimes disputed perception that disproportionate numbers of immigrants are ending up on the welfare rolls.

"There's a basic problem with having a generous welfare state at the same time you have an unscreened

immigrant flow," said George Borjas, a public policy professor at Harvard who has argued that impoverished new arrivals are an ever-increasing drain on taxpayer resources. "The new regulations have an implicit contract: If you gain that much by bringing in your relative, you should remain responsible for the cost of the immigrant. I see nothing wrong with it. It's like a user fee."

He and other supporters have hailed the revisions as a long overdue antidote to an irresponsible system that abetted the entry of welfare cases, draining government treasuries, especially in California.

"We are heartened that there is now the ability to really enforce the commitment that sponsors make when they bring people to this country," said Lisa Kalustian, a spokeswoman for California Gov. Pete Wilson.

But critics call the new rules an unseemly "affluence test" that will keep poor and working-class families divided.

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said Charles Wheeler, an attorney with the Catholic Legal Immigration Network in San Francisco.

Previous law imposed no requirement for a financial sponsor, only an obligation that the immigrants themselves demonstrate that they would not become "public charges," dependent on public relief.

Prospective immigrants must still convince U.S. authorities of their ability to make a living, showing proof of savings, skills, job guarantees or other means of support. But most legal immigrants will now also be required to find sponsors willing to sign "affidavits of support," legally binding commitments to provide for them.

Authorities anticipate that at least 565,000 U.S. residents will take on the broad new financial obligations next year in seeking to reunite with relatives. If the new immigrants are caught living on public aid, they could face deportation, INS officials said.

The new requirements are expected to have the greatest impact among Mexican and Central American immigrants- the largest immigrant

groups in Southern California. According to a study by the Urban Institute, a Washington D.C.-based think tank, more than 40 percent of all immigrant-headed U.S. families- and well over half of all families headed by settlers from Mexico and Central Americans- would no longer qualify to bring in loved ones.

The guidelines released Monday officially go into effect on Dec. 19. Regulators have labored for months to devise an immigrant sponsorship contract that will withstand expected legal challenges. Courts have ruled that existing sponsorship agreements are not legally enforceable, meaning that relatives who bring in loved ones have assumed no more than a moral obligation- one that is frequently ignored.

Under the new law, sponsors will not be free of financial responsibility until the sponsored immigrants become U.S. citizens, a process that takes at least five years, or until the settlers have worked and paid taxes for 10 years. Otherwise, the support

obligation remains in place until the sponsored immigrants die or depart permanently from the United States. Even divorce does not nullify petitioners' legal responsibility to support sponsored spouses.

The new rules apply primarily to those who draw on family ties to come to the United States, though some seeking entry via employers also will have to find sponsors. Family-based immigrants totaled almost 600,000 in fiscal 1996, accounting for almost 65 percent of all legal admissions, according to INS figures.

Among the miscellaneous groups exempt from the sponsorship requirements are refugees and political asylum-seekers, who now total about 100,000 a year. Most are by definition fleeing repressive regimes and do not have relatives here to sponsor them. Refugees, mostly from Southeast Asia and the nations of the former Soviet Union, also rank as the immigrants most likely to use welfare benefits.

North Korean soldiers abduct mother and son from DMZ

By Kevin Sullivan=(c) 1997, The Washington Post

TOKYO- A dozen North Korean soldiers Friday penetrated the South Korean-controlled half of the Demilitarized Zone that separates the two countries and abducted a 66-year-old mother and her son gathering acorns near a rice field.

The North Korean troops brought the two farmers to the northern half of the DMZ and were holding them there Friday night, said Jim Coles, a spokesman for the U.N. Command that oversees the DMZ.

The incident, the first abduction of South Korean civilians at the DMZ since 1975, is the latest in a series of aggressive acts by North Korean border guards in recent months along the heavily fortified DMZ.

Although the democratic South and the Stalinist North have been showing

some signs of closer economic and diplomatic relations recently, Friday's abduction is a reminder that military tensions continue to run extremely high.

South Korea Friday demanded that the North return the two farmers immediately. A spokesman for President Kim Young Sam told the Reuters news agency that there would be "no problem" if the captives were returned quickly, but that it could develop into a more serious matter if they were not.

Top-ranking officials from the United Nations and the North Korean military met to discuss the matter Friday afternoon in a neutral meeting room at the border village of Panmunjom. Coles said the results of that meeting had not been made public but that he was hopeful that the North Koreans would release the captives "quickly," although he did not predict

when.

"It should be over quickly _ but that's a relative term," Coles said.

The abducted farmers- identified as Hong Sung Soon and her son, Kim Young Bok, 41- were taken prisoner as they foraged for acorns, which are used in making a Korean tea. They are residents of Taesongdong, a town in the southern half of the 2.5-mile-wide DMZ that is known as Freedom Village.

The 237 residents of Taesongdong are used to such incidents. From the time the Korean War ended in 1953 to the mid-1970s, North Korean soldiers attacked or kidnapped many village residents. One recent mayor of the village still bears a large bayonet scar on his chest from an unsuccessful North Korean kidnapping attempt.

The residents of Taesongdong are the South Koreans who live closest to

North Korea. All are original residents of the area or direct descendants of those who lived here before the peninsula was divided after World War II. They tend their crops under almost constant guard by soldiers from the U.N. Command. The village has one school and one church, and the villagers live in relative comfort. Their farms are many times larger than the average farm plot in South Korea, and the average farmer here earns \$82,000 a year, more than most of the country's other farmers. This time of year, the village is full of recently harvested peppers, ginseng and rice- while a few hundred yards away in North Korea, millions are suffering from malnutrition.

The last abduction of a South Korean in the DMZ came in August 1975 in Taesongdong. That person was never returned.

Irradiation of poultry debated amid food scares

By Delthia Ricks=(c) 1997, Newsday

Zapping chickens, game hens, turkeys and produce with microbe-killing gamma rays can destroy potentially infectious organisms, but consumer groups continue to rally against the practice.

pervasive use of antibiotics in the poultry industry, which is creating a mounting problem of drug-resistant bacteria that have infected chickens, scientists say.

When chicken is carelessly prepared, poultry eaters consume not just the chicken, but its resistant disease-causing organisms as well.

the most common source of infection is poultry, but other meats can be contaminated as well."

Like salmonella poisoning, infections caused by campylobacter attack the gastrointestinal tract. Such infections can be fatal. Campylobacter infection is characterized by bloody diarrhea. Tainted food of all kinds kills about 9,000 Americans annually and sickens millions more, CDC figures show. In July, for example, a food-poisoning outbreak in Colorado led to the recall of 25 million pounds of hamburger.

Tauxe said irradiation safely kills campylobacter, salmonella, E. coli and other food-borne organisms. Yet irradiation remains one of the most contentious issues in the country.

In a low-key campaign in recent weeks, the food industry has moved to lessen the display of symbols on food containers indicating that products have undergone irradiation, while opponents have stepped up efforts to convey their message that irradiation is bad.

"It involves exposing the food supply to radioactive waste and there's enormous propaganda being thrown around about the

technology, but there is no evidence that shows it is a safe or appropriate thing to do with the nation's food supply," said Michael Colby, executive director of Food and Water, an activist group in Walden, Vt. Food and Water is opposed to irradiation, pesticide use and bioengineered foods.

Michael F. Jacobson, executive director of the Center for Science in the Public Interest in Washington, said consumer wariness of irradiation has left the government to rely on a "scratch and sniff" method of meat inspection.

"There's very little irradiated food out there," Jacobson said. "Many people are skeptical about it and maybe a little bit fearful of buying irradiated food."

That means consumers must decontaminate meat and poultry.

To reduce the risk of campylobacter and salmonella infection, food preparers should wash all surfaces where raw chicken is prepared, Tauxe said. He emphasized that chicken must be thoroughly cooked. Both organisms infect an estimated 90 percent of all chickens, but cause no disease in the birds.

Young questioners put Clinton on the spot

By John F. Harris=(c) 1997, The Washington Post

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina- Facing a sometimes skeptical audience of young adults from 14 Latin American nations, President Clinton defended himself Thursday against criticism that the United States is fueling "a new arms race" in South America and warned that it would be a "terrible mistake" if Congress does not give him expanded power to negotiate free-trade agreements.

At a TV studio here, Clinton played host to an unusual "hemispheric town hall," as promoters billed it, answering questions from one audience in the studio and two others in studios in Los Angeles and Miami. The event, carried live in many Latin nations, was intended to celebrate what Clinton called a welcome new harmony between the United States and the nations to its south, but he repeatedly found himself challenged on U.S. policies.

Clinton is waging an intense lobbying campaign to win "fast-track" authority on trade agreements, which would mean that Congress would be restricted to yes or no votes and could not seek changes in the accords. If the United States doesn't go along, Clinton said, it will be unable to prosper fully from Latin America's recent economic growth, and nations in Asia and Europe will fill the void. He also addressed two recent national security decisions that have drawn little attention in the United States but have inspired

considerable controversy in South America's "southern cone." One is the administration's waiver of a restriction on military sales to Chile, which is in the market for F-16 fighter jets. It also agreed to give Argentina a status as a "non-NATO military ally," which has caused alarm in neighboring Brazil and Chile.

Clinton said both decisions reflected well on South America's progress from decades of military rule to democracy and free markets. He said he wanted to reward Argentina, a brutal dictatorship in the early 1980s, for reforming its military and participating in numerous international peacekeeping missions. Chile's recent reforms, he added, made the old military ban unjustified.

Clinton's reception took a violent turn Thursday night, however, during a leftist protest against his visit when a small group of students smashed the windows of foreign banks and tossed in molotov cocktails.

Earlier in the day, Clinton met with Argentine President Carlos Menem. White House aides said Clinton pressed Menem on protecting press freedoms, an issue on which he has been severely criticized.

Clinton also met with families of victims of an unsolved terrorist bombing of a Jewish synagogue here. Clinton promised U.S. assistance to Argentine law enforcers.

GOP abortion foes to seek fund ban

(c) 1997, The Washington Post

Anti-abortion activists plan to push for Republican National Committee approval of a resolution that would withhold GOP funds to Republicans who oppose a ban on late-term abortions.

The conservative publication Human Events will report next week that the proposed resolution, to be offered at the RNC's winter meeting in Palm Springs, Calif., declares that "the RNC considers the partial-birth abortion technique as a crime and pledges to deny Republican Party support or funding to any Republican incumbent or challenger who does not support banning the procedure."

Charles "Chuck" Yob, chairman of the RNC's Resolutions Committee, said he has yet to

receive such a proposal, and voiced doubts about its acceptability. A strong opponent of late-term abortions, Yob said, "This is sort of touchy. I would have questions about it."

He pointed out that under the proposed resolution, the GOP would be barred from supporting the re-election campaign of New Jersey Gov. Christine Todd Whitman, who vetoed a late-term abortion ban passed by the state legislature. "I'm against partial-birth abortions, period," he said, adding, "I'd rather vote for Christie Todd Whitman than I would for some other liberal person who was a Democrat."

Republican leaders generally have opposed setting party litmus tests for candidates, often citing Ronald Reagan's view that anyone who supports the party 80 percent of the time is "a friend, not a foe."

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-Dr. Robert Tauxe
Medical Epidemiologist

A spotlight has been drawn to the irradiation issue in the wake of bacterial infections caused by tainted foods, particularly poultry. Chicken can harbor a microbial zoo within its tissues, and chief among the infectious organisms are salmonella and campylobacter, scientists say. Complicating the microbial presence is the

"In terms of human infections in this country, campylobacter is a relatively common cause of diarrheal illness. We estimate 2 million cases a year, and most of that is food-borne," said Dr. Robert Tauxe, a medical epidemiologist with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta. "We think