

If Congress doesn't take action, federal officials could soon keep citizens from traveling, getting a job, opening a bank account, or even getting medical treatment unless all their papers are in order according to the federal bureaucracy.

Amy Clark: One example of invasion of our privacy are social security numbers. These identification numbers usually have to be shown for anything from getting a job to getting a fishing license. The Freedom and Privacy Restoration Act prohibits the use of social security numbers as an identifier. In order for parents to get a birth certificate for their children and claim them as dependents, they are forced to get a security number for them. We find that this is abusing our right to privacy.

Sarah Kimball: In 1996, the Department of Health and Human Services was told to come up with a unique health identifier. Their proposed plan includes a giant database for the total medical history of every American, and a medical ID card one would have to show in order to fill a prescription, leave the country, or even check into a hotel. The police could also request to see this card at any time, and many fear that hackers would break into the medical files, destroying doctor-patient confidentiality.

Many of the problems presented are in violation of the Fourth Amendment of the Constitution, but, thankfully, the Freedom and Privacy Restoration Act would prohibit such an act and identification tool from being put into action.

Christine Miller: In conclusion, we value our privacy, which is violated by social security, medical cards, and medical IDs, and the Know-Your-Customer Act.

Congressman Sanders, can we urge you to support the legislation of the Freedom and Privacy Act in the future?

GAY MARRIAGE

(On behalf of Vera Catherine Wade, Alex Hastings, Stephanie Ladd, John Nichols and Mark Boyle)

John Nichols: As Vera already said, we are all members of the Gay-Straight Alliance at BFA. Namely, that is a group of both gay and straight people, and our main purpose is to ease some of the tensions that exist in high school life between hetero and homosexual people that is sometimes the result of perhaps ignorance and other such things that can easily be mended.

However, the reason we are here today is, when we became aware of the possibility of legislation in Vermont being suggested that would ban gay marriage, we saw that as a great concern, as infringing upon the rights of people of the homosexual persuasion.

Vera Catherine Wade: The suggested antigay marriage bills state that a valid marriage consists of a man and a woman. We believe people should have the right to marry whomever they choose. In the past, the question wasn't gender, it was race. To deny anyone the right to marry is a step backwards in equal rights to all peoples.

In addition, who is to say what a good family is? A man and a woman in an abusive relationship can bring a child into the world without planning, and where is the child supposed to go with that? A homosexual couple have no choice but to plan.

We aren't saying that everyone should get married, and we aren't saying that it's the right thing for these people to marry; we aren't encouraging anything but the right to marry for everyone.

Mark Boyle: Another issue that's a really big problem for homosexuals in many cases

is the right to insure your partner. It's okay for a man and a woman in a monogamous relationship outside of wedlock to claim people on taxes or their insurance, and yet it is not okay for homosexuals to claim a partner as a person of their family, and it's not allowed for them to get married so as to be able to include them on any type of taxes or insurance.

The issue of having somebody choose what they want to do is very at hand here. I think that a lot of people tend to stop and think of this as a moral issue, when it is more of an issue of just plain tolerance. You don't have to agree with it or disagree with it or be part of it; all that you have to do is to give people the opportunity to be Americans and to be given the rights and privileges, and the expansion of those privileges to any and all pursuits they choose, as long as it is not infringing on the rights of other humans.

FEAR AND HUNGER IN THE WAKE OF WELFARE REFORM

HON. LUIS V. GUTIERREZ

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, July 14, 1999

Mr. GUTIERREZ. Mr. Speaker, since the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act in 1996, legal immigrants have been denied access to vital health, income and nutrition assistance programs. Although the Balanced Budget Act of 1997 and the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998 restored some benefits to elderly, disabled, and minor immigrants who entered legally before August 22, 1996, researchers have documented a dramatic increase in extreme hunger and food insecurity among those affected by the law.

The following research memorandum was written by Amy K. Fauver, a research associate for the Washington-based Council on Hemispheric Affairs (COHA). The memo represents an elaborated version of an article which will appear in issue 19:09 of COHA's publication, the Washington Report on the Hemisphere. The article addresses the consequences of the immigrant-specific provisions of welfare reform, and demonstrates the need to restore essential benefits to immigrants who have come to the U.S. legally and have paid taxes, but in some circumstances have needed government assistance.

FEAR AND HUNGER IN THE WAKE OF WELFARE REFORM

(By Amy K. Fauver, Research Associate, Council on Hemispheric Affairs)

On August 22, 1996, President Clinton signed the "Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act" (PRWORA), mandating in his own words, "the end of welfare as we know it." The justification for these measures was moral and financial: welfare recipients in general "abuse" the system; welfare "hurts" people by encouraging "dependency"; and above all, taxpayers should "not have to foot the bill for immigrants" who viewed the U.S. as, according to Rep. Lamar Smith (R-TX), chairman of the Subcommittee on Immigration and Claims, "nothing more than a taxpayer-funded retirement home." Among the most

dramatic changes were those affecting the eligibility of legal, documented immigrants for federal benefit programs. Of the \$60 billion projected savings from welfare reform, approximately \$24 billion—44%—was to come from cuts in social services to immigrants. 85% of these savings were from reductions in Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Medicaid, Food Stamps and Air for Families with Dependent Children (AFDC)

PRWORA PROVISIONS TARGET IMMIGRANTS

The immigrant provisions of PRWORA created new categories of distinction among immigrants based not on their legal status, but on their date of arrival in the U.S. Previously, federal means-tested benefits were available to any legally admitted immigrant on the same terms as natural and naturalized citizens after a period of deeming. PRWORA redefined immigrants as "qualified" or "unqualified," which effectively replaced the "legal" or "illegal" dichotomy for determining entitlement, and essentially denied most legal immigrants access to benefits. Aside from emergency medical assistance and a few other programs necessary for the protection of life and safety, any benefits the newly "unqualified" were receiving at the time of the law's enactment were terminated. Although the majority of legal immigrants were "qualified," most were nonetheless barred from SSI and Food Stamps until they were naturalized. The only exemptions were those able to prove 10 years of Social Security-qualified work history, refugees, asylees and those granted withholding of deportation (but only for their first five years in the U.S.), as well as veterans and active duty military, their spouses and dependent children.

PRWORA also distinguished between immigrants based on their date of arrival in the U.S. The "before" group, of those immigrants who were legally present before August 22, 1996 (this date coincides with the signing of PRWORA), were granted greater access to benefits than the "after" group, who arrived on or after that date. The "after" group was barred from benefits for their first five years in the country, except the life and safety provisions.

Pressure to amend PRWORA came from immigrant advocacy groups and President Clinton himself, who vowed to soften the immigrant provisions of PRWORA even as he signed it. The Balanced Budget Act of 1998 reinstated \$11.4 billion of the \$23.8 billion cut from immigrant benefits, restoring SSI benefits to most "before" immigrants. The legislation also extended the length of time that refugees and asylees can collect benefits from five to seven years in response to an INS backlog of over a year. This formula was intended to provide a realistic time frame in which to naturalize before benefits would be discontinued.

In June 1998, the Agricultural Act restored \$818 million in food stamps to specific immigrants, including the elderly and legally present children under 18 from the "before" group. Although these restorations returned food stamps to approximately 250,000 immigrants, two-thirds of those previously eligible remain without such assistance. This law did not address immigrants who entered after the arbitrarily chosen cut off date.

CONSEQUENCES: FEAR AND HUNGER

Despite these attempts to soften the blow that PRWORA dealt to legally-present immigrants, it has profoundly impacted all non-citizen welfare recipients and destroyed the safety net for those not currently needing help, but who might require it in the future.

A July 1998 Urban Institute study of Los Angeles County portrays a sharp decline in immigrant applications for welfare benefits even though the vast majority remained eligible under state-funded programs. This study suggests that many immigrants are not attempting to prove their eligibility partly due to confusion about the law, but especially out of fear of negative consequences. They are afraid that revealing information about their immigration status (as in the case of undocumented parents trying to collect benefits for legal immigrant or citizen children) could result in deportation or compromise future attempts to naturalize if they are labeled a "public charge."

These well-founded anxieties can prevent those who are aware of their eligibility from seeking benefits for themselves or for their children. PRWORA's provisions requiring public agencies to report to the INS any persons "known to be unlawfully present" in the U.S., have exacerbated this fear. Although public health care providers are exempt from such reporting requirement, because they are prohibited from having an official policy that they will not share immigrant status information with the INS, they cannot guarantee protection for undocumented patients. According to the Center for Public Policy Priorities in Austin, TX, "Public health providers report that this is already having a chilling effect on the use of prenatal care, preventative care and primary care."

One of the most egregious problems directly resulting from PRWORA has been an extraordinary increase in hunger among legal immigrants. As for the welfare reductions in general, a disproportionate share of the federal savings from Food Stamp cuts came from restricting immigrant eligibility. Prior to PRWORA, 5.2% of all Food Stamp recipients were immigrants, yet over 30% of Food Stamp cuts came from slashing immigrants benefits. Not surprisingly, many immigrants who lost benefits now are suffering. A May 1998 study by Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) tracked household hunger among legal Latino and Asian immigrants in California, Texas and Illinois. Finding 79% of households interviewed to be food insecure, PHR called "the cuts against individuals who are in the U.S. legally and who pay taxes. . . a serious human rights violation." Legal immigrant households were ten times more likely than the general population to suffer from severe hunger and one-third of immigrant households surveyed reported moderate or severe hunger caused by a lack of sufficient resources.

A similar study by the California Food Policy Advocates (CFPA) echoes these findings, but also documents an "alarmingly high rate of hunger among children in legal immigrant households where food stamps have been cut." Immigrant households in Los Angeles that lost benefits were 30% more likely to experience "food insecurity with extreme hunger" than those that did not. In San Francisco, this number jumped to 173%, making immigrants affected by PRWORA almost twice as likely to be suffering from extreme hunger than an unaffected group. Moreover, in both cities, immigrant households with children which had lost food stamps were almost two-thirds more likely to experience serious food problems than similar households that retained complete benefits.

Although both studies were conducted prior to the Agricultural Act, CFPA's findings were shocking even though California exercised its option—unlike most states—to

fill the gap with state funds for the same population that now has regained eligibility. Without further legislation, marked improvements of this nature in the future are unlikely because most of those benefiting from the restoration are immigrant children living in "mixed" households where "eligible" individuals live with others who are not. In Texas alone, there are 65,396 "mixed" households with approximately 9,000 legal immigrant and 145,000 citizen children. Although these children can again collect food stamps, the total resources available to the family remain low because their parents still cannot.

IS "FAIRNESS" IN THE FUTURE?

The Fairness to Legal Immigrants Act of 1999, recently introduced in the Senate, proposes the most extensive restoration to date and offers the first substantive opportunity to right the wrongs done to legal immigrants by PRWORA. If approved, this bill would restore food stamps to all eligible "before" immigrants and those otherwise qualified "after" immigrants who suffer domestic abuse. It would also allow states to cover all pregnant legal immigrant women and children who entered after August 22, 1996 under Medicaid and restore many health and SSI disability benefits for certain immigrants from both the "before" and "after" groups. This bill represents a significant step towards rectifying several of the most controversial outcomes of welfare reform by protecting dependent children, addressing the mixed household problem and providing essential food assistance to many needy legal immigrant families. Wholehearted support by this Congress would send a clear message to law-abiding, taxpaying immigrants that they need not fear, that they need not go hungry and that they will not be abandoned in their times of need.

HONORING ODYSSEY OF THE MIND TEAMS

HON. DALE E. KILDEE

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, July 14, 1999

Mr. KILDEE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize and honor the achievements of a group of young people who have distinguished themselves as some of the brightest in the world. On July 6, school and local officials, friends, and family, gathered to honor students from Mason Middle School and Cray Middle School, both located in Waterford, Michigan, for their success in the Odyssey of the Mind world competition, recently held in Knoxville, Tennessee.

Students from Mason Middle School placed fifth out of 58 teams in the vehicle problem category, designing a vehicle that would travel through three countries, without touching the ground, and setting off a specific event upon entering the country. Through the use of superior problem solving skills, the Mason team created a vehicle that would travel through China, Egypt, and the United States. In addition to placing fifth, the team won the Ranatra Fusca Award, the competition's highest honor for creativity.

The Mason team includes Alysse Cohen, Robert Dziurda, Tamara Haynes, Caitlin Johnson, Megan Long, and Elizabeth McGregor.

Their coaches are Suzy Cohen and Robin McGregor.

Students from Cray Middle School placed sixth out of 53 teams in the environmental challenge category, creating a series of possible habitats for an animal following the destruction of the creature's original habitat, with the judges given the ability to randomly poison one of the habitats.

The Cray team includes Alex Caryl, Eric Chapman, Steve Grabowski, Brad Howell, and Jeff Ritter. The coaches were Angela and Tom Chapman.

Odyssey of the Mind teams provide a large opportunity for some of country's brightest young people to exercise their cognitive and problem-solving skills. To compete in a world competition, a team must place first in the state in their category. It is rare for more than one team from the same school district, and even more rare for them both to perform as highly as Mason and Cray has done.

Mr. Speaker, at a time when the future of our young adults is a constant concern, I am very happy to honor these students and the parents who have taken time out of their schedules to coach the teams. I ask my colleagues in the 106th Congress to join me in congratulating Mason and Cray Middle Schools.

IN RECOGNITION OF TAMARAC ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

HON. PETER DEUTSCH

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, July 14, 1999

Mr. DEUTSCH. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to celebrate the selection of Tamarac Elementary as a "National Blue Ribbon School of Excellence." It is both an honor and a privilege for me to recognize this exemplary school for receiving such a distinguished award.

Since 1982, the Blue Ribbon Schools Program has celebrated many of America's most successful schools. A Blue Ribbon symbol denotes a level of educational proficiency recognized by parents and students in thousands of communities. Superior teaching, dedicated staff, and a caring environment for students are a few reasons why Tamarac Elementary has been chosen for such an exclusive award after a rigorous selection process.

Tamarac Elementary School was built in 1973 and is the only school in the city of Tamarac, Florida. The school's extraordinary devotion to educating the leaders of the 21st century is illustrated best by its mission statement: "The mission of Tamarac Elementary is to establish an educational environment where children reach their highest potential intellectually, socially, emotionally and physically through a total commitment of school, home, and community." Mr. Speaker, I am sure that my colleagues will agree with me when I say that this mission statement demonstrates noble goals—goals which all schools should strive to fulfill.

Tamarac Elementary has taken the Blue Ribbon Challenge and triumphed with flying colors. I wish to congratulate Principal Kathleen Goldstein and her devoted staff for this