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OCT 23 1986

## OPINION...

# The National Council of La Raza, On New Immigration Legislation

State by Raul Yzaguirre, President

While the National Council of La Raza cannot endorse the immigration bill, we recognize that it is probably the best immigration legislation possible under current political conditions.

We view the new immigration legislation with mixed emotions. While it falls far short of what we had hoped for in terms of civil rights protections and protection for Salvadoran and Nicaraguan refugees, this legislation clearly represents an enormous improvement over the Senate version of the bill and over the 1984 Simpson-Mazzoli bill which died in conference committee.

Hispanics are at the same time potentially the greatest beneficiaries and the greatest victims of changes in immigration policy -- and the National Council has long been committed to supporting immigration reform. Unfortunately, public attitudes, often shaped by misleading and distorted media presentations of the immigration situation, have made achievement of fair, equitable, and humane legislation extremely difficult. In this atmosphere, even the modest improvements contained in this legislation represent significant accomplishments for those of us in the Hispanic community who have worked so hard for true immigration reform.

We are particularly pleased with the bill's legalization provisions, which are the fairest and most generous to date, and with the agricultural labor compromise, which for the first time provides full rights and protections for both foreign and

domestic farmworkers. The Cuban-Haitian adjustment provisions are a long overdue response to the plight of the boat people from these countries. We are also pleased at the retention of the House provisions which will prevent wrongful denial of benefits which would otherwise have been caused by implementation of the SAVE (Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements) Program. The National Council was actively involved in advocacy for these positive elements of the legislation, and we are proud and pleased by these accomplishments.

This legislation, however, also has some very dangerous provisions. We believe the inclusion of employer sanctions will increase employment discrimination against Hispanic citizens and legal residents who fit immigrant stereotypes. We are extremely disappointed that the provision sponsored by Congressman Robert Garcia (D-NY), which would have "sun-setted" sanctions after five years, was deleted in conference. Given the growing body of evidence that sanctions will create discrimination against native born Americans, it is most unfortunate that the Congress did not see fit to assure that this issue will be reviewed again after a reasonable period. We are also very disappointed that the anti-discrimination provisions included in the House bill -- which passed on two occasions by overwhelming margins -- were watered down by the conferees. We remain convinced that employer sanctions are a bad idea which will perpetuate dis-

crimination.

The deletion of provisions that would have temporarily suspended the deportation of Salvadoran and Nicaraguan refugees are a special problem at a time when civil war and random violence in Central America have been compounded by natural disasters.

One of the greatest deficiencies in the new legislation is its failure to address the international dimensions and implications of our immigration policies. This bill does nothing to improve the economic and political conditions in Latin America which contribute to illegal migration, and in fact may exacerbate such problems.

This entire process has been a very difficult one for the National Council and its network, but we believe that our involvement in the debate has benefited our community. We deeply appreciate the efforts of certain members of the House who played productive roles in the legislative process. We express our gratitude to Congressman Peter Rodino (D-NJ) for his commitment to a fair and generous legalization program, and to Howard Berman (D-CA) and Charles Schumer (D-NY) for their efforts in negotiating essential protections for farmworkers. And most of all, we applaud Congressman Esteban Torres (D-CA) for his statesmanlike and constructive leadership in achieving what many believe is the best immigration legislation that could have been achieved under current conditions.