

Immigrants Create Jobs, Senator Says

By Reuben S. Seguritan

Hearings were recently conducted by the immigration subcommittees of the Senate and the House of Representatives which directed their attention on two totally different issues.

The Senate hearing had a more positive approach to the immigration problem and focused on the benefits to the United States from legal immigrants. Hence, they heard testimonies of five "immigrant entrepreneurs" so that their role in the U.S. economy can be assessed. This change in attitude toward the immigration issue is spearheaded by Sen. Spencer Abraham, chairman of the senate subcommittee, who stated that "in recent years, we've tended to focus exclusively on the problems, and lost sight of the achievements" of immigrants. He further noted that "immigration in America is not simply bad news and people running across the border." He holds the belief that immigrants create jobs.

Sen. Abraham cited results of research which reveal that immigrants are 10-20% more likely than native-born U.S. citizens to embark their own businesses; that more than 10% of legal immigrants have their own business; that in 1995, companies that were put up by immigrants comprise 12% of those included in "Inc. 500", a listing of the fastest growing U.S. corporations; and that there is a strong correlation between family immigration and self-employment.

The focus of his subcommittee would be to preserve the big difference between legal and illegal immigration. The agenda which his subcommittee intends to pursue include an evaluation of the naturalization process and the INS' Citizenship USA program, the INS' implementation of the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act and its consequences, issues concerning criminal aliens such as detention space and removal, border control, the refugee consultation process, and the general effectiveness of the INS. Furthermore, additional hearings will be conducted by his subcommittee on "what is right with immigration."

Apart from the five "immigrant entrepreneurs", another witness who testified in the recent hearing was Sen. Orrin G. Hatch, chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee who acceded that the value of legal immigration should be given consideration before any discussion on legal immigration reform is commenced. He exhorted the lawmakers to "concentrate on the true immigration problems we face—illegal immigration and the need to do our part to insure the assimilation of legal immigrants into the mainstream of America."

On the other hand, the hearing conducted by the House immigration subcommittee focused on border control and narcotics trafficking. Its chairman Rep. Lamar Smith criticized the INS' border initiatives and noted that the problem merely shifted from one area to another, as the border crossers attempt substitute points of entry. He offered statistics which showed a decrease in alien arrests in the San Diego Border Patrol but showed an increase in the number of arrests in the El Paso and McAllen, Texas sectors.

Chairman Smith also blamed drug smuggling on the inadequate border control initiatives of the INS and noted the connection between drug smuggling, alien smuggling and illegal immigration. One of those who testified during the House subcommittee hearing, Rep. Silvestre Reyes, suggested that the Border Patrol be disengaged from the INS and be made a separate agency. He also recommended that the legislators consider streamlining the inspection process at borders because at present three agencies are involved, namely, INS, Customs and the Department of Agriculture.