

Veto of Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 (McCarran-Walter Act)

June 25, 1952

To the House of Representatives:

I return herewith, without my approval, H.R. 5678, the proposed Immigration and Nationality Act.

This bill would not provide us with an immigration policy adequate for the present world situation. Indeed, the bill, taking all its provisions together, would be a step backward and not a step forward.

What we do in the field of immigration and naturalization is vital to the continued growth and internal development of the United States--to the economic and social strength of our country--which is the core of the defense of the free world. Our immigration policy is equally, if not more important to the conduct of our foreign relations and to our responsibilities of moral leadership in the struggle for world peace.

I have long urged that racial or national barriers to naturalization be abolished.

But now this most desirable provision comes before me embedded in a mass of legislation which would perpetuate injustices of long standing against many other nations of the world.

The bill would continue, practically without change, the national origins quota system, which was enacted, into law in 1924, and put into effect in 1929. This quota system is long since out of date and more than ever unrealistic in the face of present world conditions

This system hinders us in dealing with current immigration problems, and is a constant handicap in the conduct of our foreign relations.

The overall limitation of numbers imposed by the national origins quota system is too small for our needs today, and the country by country limitations create a pattern that is insulting to large numbers of our finest citizens, irritating to our allies abroad, and foreign to our purposes and ideals.

Taking into account the growth in population since 1920, the law now allows us but one-tenth of one percent of our total population. And since the largest national quotas are only partly used, the number actually coming in has been in the neighborhood of one-fifteenth of one percent. This is far less than we must have in the years ahead to keep up with the growing needs of the Nation for manpower to maintain the strength and vigor of our economy.

The greatest vice of the present quota system, however, is that it discriminates, deliberately and intentionally, against many of the peoples of the world. The purpose behind it was to cut down and virtually eliminate immigration to this country from Southern and Eastern Europe.

The idea behind this discriminatory policy was, to put it baldly, that Americans with English or Irish names were better people and better citizens than Americans with Italian or Greek or Polish names. It

denies the humanitarian creed inscribed beneath the Statue of Liberty proclaiming to all nations, "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free." At the present time, this quota system keeps out the very people we want to bring in.

Through this bill we say to their people: You are less worthy to come to this country than Englishmen or Irishmen.

The only consequential change in the 1924 quota system which the bill would make is to extend a small quota to each of the countries of Asia.

The bill would make it even more difficult to enter our country. Our resident aliens would be more easily separated from homes and families under grounds of deportation, both new and old, which would specifically be made retroactive.

We would be compelled to exclude certain people because they have been convicted by "courts" in communist countries that know no justice. Under this provision, it would not be possible for us to admit many of the men and women who have stood up against totalitarian repression and have been punished for doing so.

Heretofore, for the most part, deportation and exclusion have rested upon findings of fact made upon evidence. Under this bill, they would rest in many instances upon the "opinion" or "satisfaction" of immigration or consular employees. The change from objective findings to subjective feelings is not compatible with our system of justice. The result would be to restrict or eliminate judicial review of unlawful administrative action.

The bill would sharply restrict the present opportunity of citizens and alien residents to save family members from deportation.

Native-born American citizens who are dual nationals would be subjected to loss of citizenship on grounds not applicable to other native-born American citizens.

Children would be subjected to additional risk of loss of citizenship. Naturalized citizens would be subjected to the risk of denaturalization.

I very much hope that the Congress will take early action on these recommendations. Legislation to carry them out will correct some of the unjust provisions of our laws, will strengthen us at home and abroad, and will serve to relieve a great deal of the suffering and tension existing in the world today.

HARRY S. TRUMAN