

New York DAILY NEWS

July 19, 2007

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Pols pick bogus bills over immigration reform

While the fate of 12 million people, thousands of families and the future of the nation's economy wait for Congress to do its job on immigration reform, some of its members would rather play games.

"It's all demagoguery," said Rep. Joe Crowley (D-Queens), referring to the amendment offered by Rep. Shelley Capito (R-W.Va.) and approved by the House on July 12. It was included in an affordable housing bill.

According to Capito's Web site, her "motion to recommit" - a procedural move used at the last minute to amend legislation before it's voted on - "helps ensure [that] illegal immigrants cannot access federal housing assistance [Section 8] intended for low-income citizens."

"Capito Motion Cracks Down on Taxpayer-funded Housing Assistance for Illegal Immigrants," reads a headline on her Web site.

"Loopholes in current law, like this housing assistance loophole for illegal immigrants, act as a magnet and invite people to enter our country illegally," Capito is quoted as saying. "We should not be rewarding those who have come here illegally by awarding them taxpayer-funded services intended for law-abiding citizens."

Wow! Is she tough! She's cracking down and closing loopholes! No "illegal" will take advantage of taxpayers on *her* watch!

Not to rain on her party, but there is one small problem: What loophole is she talking about? Undocumented immigrants already are ineligible for housing vouchers. Under current law, all recipients of assistance are required to be citizens or to prove their lawful immigration status.

Capito can do all the chest-thumping she wants, but there is nothing to crack down on.

Several of those who voted for Capito's amendment are known to support comprehensive reform. Yet they went along, fearful of being labeled weak on illegal immigration at election time.

"The two parties are very different," Crowley said. "While we voted 185 against and 45 in favor, 188 Republicans voted for the amendment and only 4 against."

But because a comprehensive immigration reform bill needs some Republican votes to pass, the reasons to be optimistic about the House approving - or even discussing - it this year are few and far between.

Capito's proposal works for her, though. It reinforces the unfounded notion that the undocumented are getting a free ride. And it allows her to boast about her toughness on immigration.

"It is not the first time the GOP uses these tactics," Crowley said. No, it isn't. Last September, they also pushed redundant measures.

Two of them were a ban against foreign gang members entering the U.S. and imposing criminal penalties for building or financing border tunnels for smuggling. Both already were law.

This time around, Capito and her supporters are primarily harming not the undocumented, but U.S. citizens. Her amendment would limit the documents that can be used to verify identity to an absurd degree. Many citizens and eligible immigrants will be unable to obtain them.

Just as an example, an acceptable document would be a Real-ID compliant driver's license or identification card. No matter that compliance with Real ID is not required until 2013, and that no state has been found to be currently in compliance with Real-ID.

Demagoguery? You bet. And it will only get worse.