

Editorial Article

After September 11th, many policies and reforms were introduced in the form of homeland security. One of these new policies is a controversial registration system implemented through the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). The National Security Entry-Exit Registration System requires some of the approximately 35 million non-immigrants in the U.S. to register with the INS. The registration is part of a broader two-year plan, which details who is entering, leaving and staying in the U.S.

Under the new registration system, males 16 and older from 25 different countries are required to register in person with the INS. The biggest group up to this point is the 14,000 men and boys from Saudi Arabia and Pakistan who must register by Feb. 21, but registration has also included men from Iran, Iraq, Syria, Sudan, Libya, Afghanistan, Algeria, Bahrain, Eritrea, Lebanon, Morocco, North Korea, Oman, Qatar, Somalia, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen. Most of these non-immigrants are students, business travelers or are visiting relatives. Yet many are seeking permanent residency and have been delayed over the past several years because of an INS backlog. Through previous laws, non-immigrants with expired visas could have their status regularized by paying a fine and attending an INS hearing. With the new system, immigration officials detained any person who had any immigration irregularity. Once detained, many non-immigrants face the chance of deportation. Rather than be jailed or deported, some non-immigrants have opted to flee to Canada.

Special registration has had limited coverage in the national media. Instead, it has received coverage by local media outlets and through special interest groups. I first became aware of the issue by reading an article in the *Daily Wildcat* about a former University of Arizona instructor who was facing deportation.¹ The *L.A. Times* ran a story saying the INS detained of a large number of non-immigrants due to the end of deadline rush, not a criminal risk.² National Public Radio's *All Things Considered* did a series on the effects of the Special Registration in Pakistani neighborhoods. They reported that many immigrants, both legal and illegal, are afraid of the registration and have fled to Canada.³

Special interest groups, like the Arab American Institute, American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), and American Immigration Lawyers Association, have issued statements calling for the end or revision of the Special Registration. The Arab American Institute argues that the program targets people based on national origin, race and religion, rather than on intelligence information. Also, they

¹ Ceja, Jose. Former UA instructor may face deportation. *Arizona Daily Wildcat* 1/16/03

² Weinstein, Henry and Greg Krikorian. INS blames hundreds of detentions on last-day rush. *Los Angeles Times* 12/21/02.

³ Adler, Margot. Pakistan-Canada. *All Things Considered* 2/4/03

believe the program is being ineffectively implemented as the INS is already too over-burdened and under funded.⁴ The ACLU is funding a \$3.5 million national campaign, Keep America Safe and Free. The print and television ads target special registration, as well as other "unconstitutional provisions of the USA PATRIOT Act and other government actions."

Yet there is support for Special Registration, but coming from an unlikely source. While most Canadians are in uproar over new U.S. border controls and are accepting asylum seekers, some officials agree with the program. Canadian newsmagazine *National Post* ran an editorial by James Bissett, a former Canadian ambassador and head of the Canadian Immigration Service, supporting U.S. border security. He states that Canada's immigration policy is so relaxed it borders on neglectful.⁵ In an article published by another Canadian newsmagazine, *Report*, stated Canadian Security Intelligence Service has said there are no fewer than 50 terrorist organizations operating in Canada.⁶

Few of the new legislations had any direct impact on my daily life. As a result, I paid little attention to the information about them in the media. The article in the *Daily Wildcat* was most influential, in that it showed the immediacy of the issue. The story on *All Things Considered* was also influential because it featured the voices of people being targeted through the program. Their voices carried more emotion, and therefore more power, than two-dimensional pictures in the newspaper. The newspaper stories were more informational than influential. It's doubtful they would change a person's opinion on this issue. The articles about the Canadian threat gave some credence to the program, but they did not address the reason for registering non-immigrants already living in the U.S. The lack of Department of Justice and INS information was interesting. They provided only instructions for registering and no justification as to why specific countries were being targeted.

After doing research on this issue, I believe the program needs to be revised. Non-immigrants with ties to the U.S. and a clean record should not be deported or detained indefinitely. Additionally, consulates and embassies do background checks and interviews before visa are granted. These investigations should be increased, so that possible terrorists are not given visas in the first place. The Sept. 11 hijackers entered the country legally and still held valid visas at the time of the attacks.⁷ The Special Registration would have done little to stop them.

⁴ Arab Americans, Civil Rights, Immigration Advocates Write to Bush. Arab American Institute 1/9/03.

⁵ Bissett, James. Your documents please. *National Post*. 2/6/03

⁶ Grace, Kevin Michael. Uncle Sam looks north. *Report* 12/2/02

⁷ Gamboa, Suzanne. INS counts 7 million immigrants living in U.S. illegally. *Associated Press* 1/31/03

