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### Senate swayed by analyst's immigrant count How conservative think tank's estimate led to changes in bill

- Carolyn Lochhead, Chronicle Washington Bureau

**(06-20) 04:00 PDT Washington** -- As obvious as the question seemed, nobody had really calculated how many more people the Senate's immigration bill would add to the U.S. population when the Senate opened debate on the issue last month.

So when a think tank analyst projected more than 100 million over the next 20 years -- raising the U.S. population by a third, or nearly three Californias and perhaps even twice that -- it landed like a perfectly timed statistical bomb.

Now, as the bill moves forward, the debate isn't just about the estimated 12 million illegal immigrants already living in the county -- but the tens of millions of new legal immigrants the legislation might produce in the future.

Within 24 hours of the report's publication, the Senate passed an amendment sharply limiting the new guest worker program, a key provision of the bill. Before final passage, the Senate had capped the number of new employment visas -- including relatives of workers -- that could be issued in any year.

Now the numbers are questioned as too high and based on faulty estimates.

The report by analyst Robert Rector of the conservative Heritage Foundation was intended for Republican opponents of the bill, which has passed the Senate and awaits a conference with the House. Rector presented his findings at a Senate Republican policy luncheon, an informal party gathering held each week just off the Senate floor.

But two Democrats acted on it: Sens. Dianne Feinstein of California and Jeff Bingaman of New Mexico, whose amendments sharply scaled back the scope of the legislation. Feinstein cited Rector's high-end numbers during the floor debate on the comprehensive immigration measure.

Those changes were among the biggest made to the Senate bill. Some analysts believe they could undermine its intent, which is to stem illegal immigration by offering a legal path for the 12 million people now living illegally in the country and for future workers.

"It is my understanding that studies of the bill now on the floor have shown that this bill could allow up to 193 million new legal immigrants," Feinstein said, citing Rector's high-end figure. "It is simply too many."

Feinstein's argument helped successfully reduce the guest worker program from the proposed 325,000 a year to 200,000 and remove a provision allowing a 20 percent increase each year.

Until Rector's report, the debate had focused on the 12 million illegal immigrants and the 325,000 new guest worker visas. Those numbers are large, but the 12 million are already here and the guest workers would make up a fraction of the 155-million-strong U.S. labor force.

Rector added up all the visa categories over 20 years, including how many family members immigrants could bring with them once they gain legal status. His mid-range estimate of new legal immigrants is five times current levels.

Rector's analysis was soon attacked by pro-immigration analysts, who noted that 100 million is the equivalent of almost the entire population of Mexico, and that his high-end estimate of 193 million would empty not just Mexico but all of Central America.

They accused him of double counting, ignoring emigration, using unreasonably high assumptions of legalization and naturalization and other errors that compounded over time to produce eye-popping numbers.

"I'm happy to express reservations about whether current levels of immigration are appropriate or not, but I don't think this kind of work gets us any closer to answering those questions," said Benjamin Johnson, director of the non-profit Immigration Policy Center, who attended the GOP luncheon to counter Rector's analysis.

"He made it absolutely clear that in his view this would be unleashing a tidal wave," Johnson said. "His language was very inflammatory that way, of poor, mostly Hispanic immigrants who have children out of wedlock. Based on that, it convinced me his goal was not to get at the legitimate question of what would the impact of this be; it was to scare people into believing that we would forever change the face of America and it would cost us untold billions of dollars."

Leading demographers said that although they have not deconstructed Rector's numbers in detail, they sound too high and lie well outside historical ranges, even those during the late 19th century when U.S. borders were open. The high-end projection assumes, for instance, that the

economy would demand 22 million low-skilled temporary workers in the 20th year of the program.

Even Rector's newer number of 66 million over 20 years, adjusted for the Senate's changes, seems wrong on its face, demographers said. That would imply 3.3 million new immigrants a year, more than three times the 1 million now admitted annually, and far above historic norms.

"That just can't be," said Carl Haub, senior demographer for the Population Reference Bureau. Such calculations "rarely take into account that people leave as well ... Immigration is a net event. People come, and then they go."

Jeffrey Passel, a senior researcher at the Pew Hispanic Center whose estimate of 12 million undocumented immigrants is considered authoritative, said, "We've never had anywhere near that many, ever."

The Congressional Budget Office projected 8 million net new migrants over the next 10 years under the Senate bill. It did not count as new immigrants those already here, as Rector does.

And a new analysis by the pro-immigration **National Foundation for American Policy** concluded the 20-year total would come to about 28.4 million, but includes many who would not be new arrivals, but people adjusting their status.

Rector, who called that study very credible, stands by his analysis, which continues to be widely cited by opponents of the bill.

"Until we put this study out, there was absolutely no awareness that this bill was increasing legal immigration at all, let alone how much," he said. "And once the numbers were out there, the Senate acted to reduce them, although I would still say with anybody's current estimates we're still talking about doubling legal immigration."

As for emptying Mexico, Rector noted that the bill is not restricted to Mexico.

"Immigration has a tendency to surprise people," Rector said. "Mexico is not the least developed country in the world. I think they could be underbid by workers from all over the globe."

The debate touches a nerve. Polls show that very few people favor higher immigration, even if many are content with the current level or divided about what to do about those already here. Immigration shapes American

racial composition and affects the country's size, economy and environment.

With no change in the law as it is now, census projections show the U.S. population growing from nearly 300 million today, to 336 million in 2020, reaching 420 million by 2050, when non-Hispanic whites are expected to fall to half the population. The immigration levels Rector contemplates would have a large effect on these projections.

Rector added up over 20 years the number of immigrants that would be admitted under the Senate bill and calculated how many family members they could bring with them. These "chain migrations," once set in motion, can multiply through family relations into large population flows.

Chain migration is a long-recognized pattern that has surprised policymakers before, notably in 1965, when a new law unexpectedly opened immigration flows from Asia. It is also a staple of scary population scenarios by groups such as NumbersUSA that advocate lower population growth. The term "chain migration" has itself assumed vague racial undertones that imply Third World hordes clamoring at the gates.

But Sen. Jeff Sessions, R-Ala., used charts on the Senate floor to illustrate the consequences of chain migration. Once an immigrant becomes a legal permanent resident, he or she can bring in a spouse and children, "maybe half a dozen children," Sessions said. Five years later, the immigrant can naturalize and bring parents and siblings, who later can bring in their spouses and children, and their spouse's parents, and what began as one worker can become dozens of relatives.

"All the uncles can come in through the parents," Sessions said. "The wife can bring in brothers and sisters. Then the wife brings in her brother, who brings in his wife and two children, and she brings in her parents. It just goes on and on."

But historically, immigrants bring just 1.2 dependents with them.

Immigration projections are uncertain because the act of migrating is affected by a complex interplay of human and economic factors, from the marriage rate of naturalized citizens to political or economic events overseas. Immigration flows can suddenly dry up, as they did in the 1990s from Ireland, or start, as they did in the late 1960s from Asia.

"I don't think anyone's done a very good job of projecting immigration and projecting how policies actually work," Passel said. "Future immigration flows don't happen in a vacuum."

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## Immigration numbers

- Current legal immigration: 1 million per year
- Estimated annual illegal immigration: 400,000
- Estimated number of illegal immigrants now living in the United States: 12 million
- Current estimated U.S. population: 298 million
- Current estimated Mexico population: 107 million

## Effect of Senate's immigration legislation

- Robert Rector's Heritage Foundation report estimates 100 million to 193 million immigrants over 20 years (reduced to 66 million over 20 years because of changes in the bill).
- Congressional Budget Office estimates 8 million over 10 years (not including 12 million illegal immigrants now in the United States).
- National Foundation for American Policy estimates 28.4 million over 20 years, including many immigrants now awaiting green cards as permanent legal residents.

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