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House OKs immigration reform

Reaction: Employers wary as aliens fear a jobless future

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To Gloria Lopez, the illegal-alien bill that passed the House on Wednesday means the loss of dozens of friends in her neighborhood.

To Luis Mena Arroyo, it could mean separation from his younger brother.

And to employers throughout Orange County, the bill translates into thousands of job openings and paranoia about who they will hire to fill them.

Once it becomes law, the bill is expected to result in the firing of most workers among the estimated 80,000 to 120,000 illegal aliens hiding from immigration officials in Orange County.

"It's going to mean losing a lot of our friends," said Lopez, director of Independencia Community Center in Anaheim, located in a west

Anaheim barrio of about 750 people. "It's going to cause a real upheaval in this community. It's bad news to the real low-income people here."

Orange County companies that rely on low-paid factory, farm and restaurant workers are expected to be hit hardest. Some companies have begun firing employees in anticipation of the bill's sanctions against anyone who hires illegal aliens.

Felicitas Moreida, 32, an illegal alien in Anaheim who has lived in the United States for seven years, said she will have trouble feeding her six children after having been fired recently.

"We've already lost our jobs in a factory because of this. Employers fear hiring us," said Moreida, a resident of the Colonia Independencia neighborhood in Anaheim who emigrated from a

ranch near Guadalajara, Mexico. She declined to name her former employer.

"This is a big problem to us, because my husband could lose his job too. But we don't want to go back to Mexico, no matter what," she said, adding that she will now take English courses to help in finding a job.

Lopez said she knew two women who had worked in Orange County factories for 17 years before they were laid off this week.

The bill — known as the Simpson-Mazzoli reform measure — grants amnesty to aliens who can prove they arrived here before 1982. But even that drew mixed reaction because it could divide families and split up friendships.

Mena Arroyo, 22, of Anaheim, said he and his sister would qualify because both have lived here since 1979. But his younger brother, Jorge, immigrated this year.

"What will happen to him?" Mena Arroyo asked in Spanish.

Lopez said up to 10 percent of Colonia Independencia is made up of "new arrivals — the new wave of really recent illegals" who would face immediate deportation under the law.

"And what faces them at home is poverty. This is no solution," she said.

California's food-service indus-

REACTION: Aliens see jobless future; some OC employers predict enforcement headaches

try reacted to the bill's passage by saying it makes restaurant owners responsible for policing illegal immigrants.

"I'm not sure it's our responsibility to police for the federal government. What they're doing is having us do their dirty work," said Ruben Villavicencio, owner of R & M Food Services, a 17-restaurant chain in Orange, Los Angeles, Ventura and Riverside counties.

Because of fake Social Security cards obtained by some illegal aliens, employers often do not realize they are hiring non-citizens. Villavicencio said his restaurants sometimes unwittingly hire illegal aliens who show false identification.

"There's a lot of opposition to potential punishment for an act that could be unknowingly committed," said Judy Shane, director of operations for the California Restaurant Association in Los Angeles.

Shane could not estimate how many illegal aliens were employed in restaurants, but she said Hispanics make up about 20 percent of workers in the industry.

"It's a hassle, a headache to the employer. But the INS (Immigration and Naturalization Service) won't be going after us. It won't affect our business, even though we have hired illegals sometimes. They'll go after the big guys," said

Arthur Guevara, whose family runs the Mixtla Mexican Restaurant in Garden Grove.

Officials from the Irvine Co. said they could not determine the effect on the agricultural industry until details of the bill are formulated.

"We have no idea of how the law would be administered," said

Irvine Co. spokesman Jerry Collins. "But we don't think the sanctions will affect us because we've never knowingly hired undocumented workers."

Organized labor in the United States supports the bill, saying that undocumented workers take jobs away from Americans. But the Ur-



Chuy Herrera, son Jose, 7 months, and Felicita Moreida. Herrera wonders who will do the work now being done by illegal aliens.

ban Institute in Washington, D.C., reported the illegal aliens stimulate the economy by allowing many Southern California companies to pay low wages and remain in business.

Orange County businesses are expected to be affected more by the bill than most areas because the county cannot easily attract workers willing to work for the minimum wage.

Many of the jobs are those that many Americans seem unwilling to perform.

"Who's going to do all the dirty work that's being done now by us?" said Chuy Herrera, a 30-year-old illegal alien in Anaheim and mother of three children. "Americans don't seem to like those jobs, and it's usually people from Mexico who will take those."

Nearly all of the Irvine Co.'s farmhands are immigrants from Mexico.

Factory assembly lines will not shut down because of the restraints, but the companies will have to scramble to fill vacancies left by workers who cannot prove their citizenship.

"It certainly will affect us, just like any other company," said Hal Takier, personnel manager for B.P. John Furniture Co. in Santa Ana. "Any time immigration

comes into a plant, it has an impact whether they take one worker or 50."

About 100 of the company's 300 employees are assembly-line workers. Takier estimates one-third of those workers could be illegal aliens who gave him false identification.

"What do I know about a green card? They can buy them a dime a dozen. One card looks like another," he said.

Problems with the bill outweigh any benefits of granting amnesty to some illegal aliens, critics say.

"Certainly everybody is looking for some kind of reform, but there are onerous parts of this bill," said Rusty Kennedy, executive director of the Orange County Human Relations Commission. "It's not only extra paper work and a quasi-police function for employers, but, by our estimation, it will be totally ineffective."

Some companies and human-rights advocates say the law is discriminatory. Only Hispanic employees who "look the part" will be asked to prove their residency, while Caucasian workers will not be bothered with the task.

"It fosters discrimination against foreign-acting or foreign-sounding individuals," Kennedy said.