Walter Capps' Views on Immigration:

A. Background:

A number of factors have conspired to make immigration an important and highly volatile social, moral and political issue at the present time.

In the first place, national immigration practices tend to become items of intense scrutiny during times of economic downturn. In times of hard-ship, the newest arrivals to the country, particularly if they are working for pay, have typically been accused of taking jobs away from those who have been residents much longer. At the present time in California, such accusations are directed against those who have entered the country across the U.S border with Mexico. In earlier periods, the alleged culprits were the Irish, the Chinese, and numerous other groups. Consequently, what we have been experiencing during the past several years is not a new pheno-menon, but repeats certain immigration tensions of the past.

Secondly, the history of the United States is usually placed on a horizontal axis, marked by east-to- west movement, that is, from Europe to North America, and then, via westward expansion, from the east coast across the midwest to the western regions of the United States. History told this way overlooks or downplays the perpetual movement that has been occurring on vertical axis, from south to north (and from north to south), particularlly on the west coast. Movement of peoples across the border(s) with Mexico has been recurrent over the centuries, and continues to the present time. Indeed, the State of California was established along south-to-north axis lines (witness the development of the Franciscan Missions as well as the significant role played by El Camino Real). Consequently, the movement of individuals and peoples across the southern border of the United States is not a new phenomenon, but was occuring long before current occupants of the land were here.

Thirdly, no matter how these matters are judged, the fundamental tension is due to the fact that the relationship between Mexico and the United States is asymmetrical. Particularly in economic terms, the United States is much stronger, and thus becomes the destination of those who wish to improve their lot. The attractiveness of the United States, for those living south of the border, will continue as long as this asymmetrical relationship persists.

Fourthly, the recent tensions concerning immigration policy are partly to be explained by shifts in workforce incentives within the United States. There was a time, indeed, within the past decade, when the State of

California needed even more workers than they were receiving from across the border. In that period, immigration policy was not rigidly enforced. But with the economic downturn in the United States, and with the loss of defense revenue in California (due to the end of the Cold War) immigration attitudes have been sharply reversed. Those who had come into the country rather easily, either legally or illegally, learned that previous practice was being changed. Official United States immigration policy has been signifi-cantly affected by these market and workforce fluctuations. The need to insert rigor into the prevailing policy, as we have already noted, is primarily due to the absence of economic well-being on the United States side of the border.

Fifthly, because these tensions are currently running high, many legitimate American citizens -- some of whose families have been here for two or three generations and more -- have become objects of suspicion, requiring that they prove or demonstrate the legitimacy of their citizenship. There is considerable evidence that a high percentage of U.S. citizens of Mexican-American roots have been made to feel much less than comfortable in their own land. In addition, the outcry against illegal immigration has been expanded and extended to question the legitimacy of legal immigration, as services to legal immigrants are being sharply questioned.

B. Capps' Position

The recommended policy of Capps for Congress on this matter carries the following components:

(1) Illegal immigration can never be condoned. All appropriate steps, the majority of which are outlined in the proposed legislation by Senator Feinstein, must be taken to reduce the number of illegal immigrants, and to stop illegal immigration traffic.

(2) The U.S. Immigration Service, together with the U.S. State Department, should be encouraged to work diligently with the government of Mexico to foster shared workable agreements as to how this problem might be solved. We applaud the meetings that have occurred between the appropriate governmental agencies of both nations, and the ones that are planned for the future. Toward this end, the experts at El Colegio de la Frontera Norte and the University of California San Diego, should be consulted, and fresh agreements (such as those between the cities of San Diego and Tijuana) should be developed in light of current circumstances.

(3) In every useful respect, immigration tensions and problems must be "de-politicized." That is, the subject of immigration can be removed from the context of current "cultural wars" and intensified political rhetoric. The challenge will never be satisfactorily met if the subject is treated first as a "wedge issue" within the context of inflammatory politics. The contest over "correct politics" is part of the problem.

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