

Cambridge Tab

May 20-26, 1997

16

Protect the Immigrants

I am writing to urge the adoption of a plank in the Democratic Party platform that makes it clear, in the strongest terms possible, that the Democratic Party's commitment to immigrants will not waiver and that we deplore the anti-immigrant sentiment which has infected many in Washington.

Close to 20 percent of the people who live in my state Senate district came to this country from somewhere else. Some have been here for many years, while others are part of a more recent wave of immigration, the largest since the turn of the century. The immigrants who have come to this country and settled in the neighborhoods of my district in the past few decades are responsible for much of the continued growth and vitality of these neighborhoods.

In Brighton, I have met elderly Russians who fought side-by-side with the Americans in World War II, Vietnamese who left their own country to live in a democracy, and Irish who could not find jobs at home. In Cambridge, I talk regularly to Haitians who have started businesses and built new churches, and to Portuguese and Brazilians who have instituted strong community and social groups. In my hometown of Watertown, I regularly visit the stores, restaurants and other businesses operated by Greek and Armenian immigrants to this country.

I can't imagine what my district would be like without these groups. Yet recent changes in immigration law will result in significant decreases in the number of legal immigrants who qualify for entry to this country.

Even more frightening is the threat posed by last year's federal welfare legislation which means that 16,000 elder-

ly and disabled legal immigrants will lose SSI and food stamps, while most other legal immigrants, including those with children, will also lose food stamps. Legal immigrants may also be denied welfare, medical care and other social services.

Immigrants do not come here to collect welfare benefits. They come to rejoin family members who are already here, because employers need their skills or because they are fleeing persecution. Many have worked hard here (immigrants are less likely than others to be on welfare), paid taxes and served in the U.S. military. Having paid into the system, they have the same right citizens do to collect benefits when they need them, and it is wrong to change the rules of the game now.

Furthermore, it is simply despicable to attempt to balance the federal budget (more than half the savings in the welfare legislation come from cuts in food stamps) on the backs of the very same people who have helped to build this country.

I urge the party platform to include measures that express our support for action, on both the state and federal level, to protect immigrants on both the state and federal level. Such actions should include an endorsement of attempts, on the federal level, of legislation to reinstate SSI and food stamp benefits to those who were receiving them prior to the passage of the welfare legislation.

On the state level, we need to support legislation, which has already passed the Massachusetts Senate, to provide alternative benefits programs for immigrants, as well as a proposed food voucher program. Finally, we need to support legislation to establish a state program to enable legal immigrants to become citizens.

I believe that our party should be in the vanguard of efforts to protect immigrants, and should play a role in educating other Americans — who may not be lucky enough to live in districts as diverse as mine — about the accomplishments and valuable role of immigrants in this country.

State Sen. Warren E. Tolman (D-Watertown)



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24 June 1997

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STATE ADMINISTRATION

The Honorable The City Council
c/o Margaret Drury, City Clerk
City of Cambridge
Cambridge, MA 02139

Dear Councillors:

Thank you for forwarding to me two resolutions passed by the Cambridge City Council. Both resolutions—one concerning aid for legal immigrants, the other employment and training opportunities for TAFDC recipients—have to do with issues which have been of great concern to me.

About 20% of the residents of my Senate district are immigrants. Funding for aid for legal immigrants who are losing SSI and food stamp assistance was one of my priorities in this year's budget, and I am happy to report that the final FY98 budget includes funding for these items. I was pleased to receive notice of the City Council's resolution expressing appreciation for the Cambridge delegation's work on this issue. I am also enclosing a copy of a letter I wrote to the Democratic State Platform Committee which was reprinted in the Tab.

I strongly supported the budget amendment to allow recipients to count education and training hours towards the 20 hour community service requirement. It is clear to me that TAFDC recipients will not be able to find jobs which allow them to leave welfare—the ostensible goal of welfare reform—without marketable skills. Acquisition of such skills requires adequate training and I firmly believe that time spent in training should be counted towards work requirement hours. I was disappointed that this amendment was not allowed to come up for a roll call vote during the Senate's budget debate, and I hope that it will be included in the final version of the budget.

Thank you again for forwarding these resolutions to me.

Sincerely,

Warren E. Tolman

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cc: City Councillors

Consent Communications #16

S-472

Communication was received from Senator Warren E. Tolman, transmitting his appreciation for the two resolutions adopted by the City Council regarding aid for legal immigrants, and employment and training opportunities for TAFDC recipients.

In City Council August 4, 1997

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