

Statement on Coordination of Fast Track Legislation

July 24, 1997

I am pleased to announce the appointment of Jason S. Berman to serve as Special Counselor to the President and coordinate the administration's effort to pass fast track legislation.

During his tenure at the White House, Mr. Berman will take a leave of absence from his current position as chairman of the Recording Industry Association of America. I am grateful to him for setting aside this work to join our team. Mr. Berman's extensive knowledge of trade policy and unparalleled experience on the Hill will be invaluable to our effort.

I am also pleased to announce that I have asked Victoria L. Radd, an outstanding member of my staff, to join Mr. Berman in coordinating this effort. Ms. Radd is an Assistant to the President and Chief of Staff to Erskine Bowles. During the past 4 years, she has also served as Associate Counsel to the President and as Deputy Director of Communications. Prior to joining the White House, she was a partner in the law firm of Williams & Connolly.

The economic strategy of my administration, based on reducing the deficit, investing in the education and skills of our people, and opening markets, has helped produce the strongest economy in the world. I am calling on the Congress to enact fast track legislation so we can continue our aggressive drive to open markets to our goods and services and create more high skilled jobs for the American people. Every President, Republican and Democrat, in the past two decades has had this vital tool to maintain effective American leadership in the global economy. Fast track authority is in the national interest of the United States, and my appointment of Jay Berman makes clear my determination to fight for passage of this important legislation.

Statement on the Proposed "Immigration Reform Transition Act of 1997"

July 24, 1997

I am pleased to transmit to the Congress today the "Immigration Reform Transition Act of 1997." This proposal reflects my commitment to balance firm controls against illegal immigration with common sense and compassion. It would provide a needed transition for individuals who apply for a form of immigration relief called suspension of deportation and who had immigration cases pending before the 1996 immigration law took effect. It would prevent the inherent unfairness of applying new rules to old cases.

This legislation also addresses the special circumstances of Central Americans who came to our country because of civil war and upheaval. Today, the remarkable progress in that region means that many of those people can return home. But as I assured the leaders of Central America when I visited the region in May, we want that to occur in a manner that avoids destabilizing the nations and economies of Central America, or imposing undue hardships on families. We also want to make sure that people who sought refuge in our country and who have contributed greatly to their local communities here in the United States are treated with fairness and dignity. To meet that commitment, this proposal ensures that certain groups of Central Americans whose cases were pending before the new immigration law took effect would be eligible to apply for suspension of deportation under the prior rules.

I am determined to do all I can to preserve our Nation's tradition of generous legal immigration. But just as we are a nation of immigrants, we also are a nation of laws. To uphold the tradition of generous legal immigration and to do right by legal immigrants, we need to continue working to stop illegal immigration. The bill I am submitting today in no way diminishes the important enforcement objectives of the 1996 immigration bill, nor is it an amnesty or waiver program. Rath-

er, it eases the transition to the new law for individuals who have put down deep roots in the United States—and it advances our Nation's strategic interest in promoting peace, prosperity, and stability in Central America.

Message to the Congress on the Proposed "Immigration Reform Transition Act of 1997"

July 24, 1997

To the Congress of the United States:

I am pleased to submit for your immediate consideration and enactment the "Immigration Reform Transition Act of 1997," which is accompanied by a section-by-section analysis. This legislative proposal is designed to ensure that the complete transition to the new "cancellation of removal" (formerly "suspension of deportation") provisions of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 (IIRIRA; Public Law 104-208) can be accomplished in a fair and equitable manner consistent with our law enforcement needs and foreign policy interests.

This legislative proposal would aid the transition to IIRIRA's new cancellation of removal rules and prevent the unfairness of applying those rules to cases pending before April 1, 1997, the effective date of the new rules. It would also recognize the special circumstances of certain Central Americans who entered the United States in the 1980s in response to civil war and political persecution. The Nicaraguan Review Program, under successive Administrations from 1985 to 1995, protected roughly 40,000 Nicaraguans from deportation while their cases were under review. During this time the *American Baptists Churches v. Thornburgh* (ABC) litigation resulted in a 1990 court settlement, which protected roughly 190,000 Salvadorans and 50,000 Guatemalans. Other Central Americans have been unable to obtain a decision on their asylum applications for many years. Absent this legislative proposal, many of these individuals would be denied protection from deportation under IIRIRA's new cancellation of removal rules. Such a result would unduly harm stable fami-

lies and communities here in the United States and undermine our strong interests in facilitating the development of peace and democracy in Central America.

This legislative proposal would delay the effect of IIRIRA's new provisions so that immigration cases pending before April 1, 1997, will continue to be considered and decided under the old suspension of deportation rules as they existed prior to that date. IIRIRA's new cancellation of removal rules would generally apply to cases commenced on or after April 1, 1997. This proposal dictates no particular outcome of any case. Every application for suspension of deportation or cancellation of removal must still be considered on a case-by-case basis. The proposal simply restores a fair opportunity to those whose cases have long been in the system or have other demonstrable equities.

In addition to continuing to apply the old standards to old cases, this legislative proposal would exempt such cases from IIRIRA's annual cap of 4,000 cancellations of removal. It would also exempt from the cap cases of battered spouses and children who otherwise receive such cancellation.

The proposal also guarantees that the cancellation of removal proceedings of certain individuals covered by the 1990 ABC litigation settlement and certain other Central Americans with long-pending asylum claims will be governed by the pre-IIRIRA substantive standard of 7 years continuous physical presence and extreme hardship. It would further exempt those same individuals from IIRIRA's cap. Finally, individuals affected by the legislation whose time has lapsed for reopening their cases following a removal order would be granted 180 days in which to do so.

My Administration is committed to working with the Congress to enact this legislation. If, however, we are unsuccessful in this goal, I am prepared to examine any available administrative options for granting relief to this class of immigrants. These options could include a grant of Deferred Enforced Departure for certain classes of individuals who would qualify for relief from deportation under this legislative proposal. Prompt legislative action on my proposal would ensure a smooth transition to the full implementa-