

New Report: Nativism In the House

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The collapse of this summer's bi-partisan immigration reform legislation served as a national coming out party for the House Immigration Reform Caucus. During the last two legislative sessions, it has been the reef upon which realistic and fair-minded attempts at immigration policy reform have foundered. It promotes policies that can be fairly described as both nativist and inhumane. And the Caucus' links to controversial nativist organizations auger for even greater conflict and danger ahead.

Despite the fringe nature of their politics, the HIRC claims 110 members, a full 25% of the House of Representatives. The Caucus is one of the largest, most coherent forces in an increasingly splintered House of Representatives. Until now, they have gone virtually unnoticed and unexamined.

This report by the Building Democracy Initiative of the Center for New Community in Chicago, *Nativism in the House*, is the first of its kind. It narrates the growth of the House Immigration Reform Caucus (HIRC), assesses the legislation it has initiated, and compiles data on the voting records of its members. The report also analyzes the campaign contributions HIRC members have received, and looks at the demographic character of the congressional districts they represent.

This report also begins an examination of the Caucus' relationship to the larger anti-immigrant social movement, particularly in regard to the Federation for American Immigration Reform. The major findings are certain to initiate a much-needed discussion by immigrants' rights advocates, political moderates, and Americans who find themselves conflicted on immigration policy but are thoroughly uncomfortable with the bigoted rhetoric and ideology espoused by many in the anti-immigrant movement and their supporters in the HIRC.

Among the report's key findings:

- The overwhelming majority of Caucus members are from the furthest, hardest edge of the Republican Party's rightwing; only eight are Democrats. Although they often invoke the supposed interests of native-born wage earners, these representatives generally have stiff anti-labor voting records. Many also oppose a woman's right to choose, and vote regularly against civil rights and civil liberties concerns.

- The report finds that the Caucus is ideologically-driven, and might more accurately fit an "ultra-nationalist" model typically associated with far-right European parties such as Jean-Marie Le Pen's National Front in France, the Vlaams Belang in Belgium, or the Swiss Peoples Party. Although it is often assumed that nativist politics are the result of economic resentment, these congressmen and women are not elected from districts with a common economic or demographic character. They come from suburban, middle class California districts with a significant minority of Hispanic residents. In the South, Mid-South, and West they are elected from districts with a measurable percentage of rural, blue collar white voters, and very small numbers of Hispanics.

- Notwithstanding the Caucus' political character, its members have received campaign contributions from a surprisingly wide range of sources, including AT&T, the American Medical Association, and Home Depot. All told, 2600 PACs, most of whom are not considered anti-immigrant, have contributed to the HIRC's campaign coffers. In addition, Caucus members receive funding from nativist sources such as the Minuteman PAC as well as from ultra-conservative sources such as the Eagle Forum and the Club for Growth.

- The election of Rep. Brian Bilbray as the Caucus' chairman is likely to cement the already symbiotic relationship between fringe anti-immigrant advocacy groups and Caucus members. Rep. Bilbray is himself a former lobbyist for the Federation for American Immigration Reform, a controversial anti-immigrant organization that holds questionable ties to white nationalist and nativist groups. At the same time, the former HIRC director has gone to work at FAIR as a Government Relations Associate.

- Most recently, Caucus members have begun to actively promote legislation aimed at gutting the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. As of the time of this report's printing, 90 members of the House of Representatives signed on as co-sponsors to legislation aimed at nullifying the Fourteenth Amendment's "birthright" provision. If passed, this type of legislation would certainly provoke a constitutional crisis.

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