

## Memphian urges board to check rejected visas

By Bartholomew Sullivan

Friday, November 9, 2007

WASHINGTON -- Memphis immigration lawyer Gregory Siskind told a House Judiciary subcommittee that a board to review immigration visa applications denied at overseas U.S. consulates is "long overdue" and should be created.

The proposed board is part of the Save America Comprehensive Immigration Act that includes a path to citizenship for the 9 million to 20 million undocumented immigrants now in the country. It is one of several immigration-reform proposals pending in Congress.

Siskind was one of seven witnesses testifying about the bill introduced by Rep. Sheila Jackson-Lee, D-Texas.

He said the board, first recommended by Sen. Edward Kennedy, D-Mass., in 1970, would bring fairness and oversight to the overseas visa application process and improve the image of the United States.

Because many consulates bar lawyers from representing their clients before State Department officials, a prospective immigrant may be asked legal questions that can lead to a denial, Siskind said. Currently, the ruling of a consular official denying a visa cannot be appealed.

The oversight of the five-member board proposed in the bill would instill confidence in its fairness, he said.

"Sending out the message that our consular officers are arbitrary and capricious does nothing to advance America's public diplomacy efforts," Siskind said.

Other panelists included William Spriggs, chairman of the department of economics at Howard University; Charles H. Kuck, president-elect of the American Immigration Lawyers Association; T.J. Bonner, president of the National Border Patrol Council of the American Federation of Government Employees; Kim Gandy, president of the National Organization for Women; Julie Kirchner, director of the Federation for American Immigration Reform; and Christopher Nugent, an immigration lawyer.

Spriggs noted that one provision of the bill would put on a path to citizenship the estimated 3 million illegal immigrants now married to U.S. citizens.

But Kirchner said the bill would treat legal immigrants committing Social Security fraud as criminals and deport them while giving amnesty to an illegal immigrant accused of the same fraudulent behavior.

Reach The Commercial Appeal's Washington correspondent Bartholomew Sullivan at (202) 408-2726 or [SullivanB@shns.com](mailto:SullivanB@shns.com)



© 2007 Scripps Treasure Coast Newspapers