

A discussion of immigration reform at 99th congress

[Sociology](#), [Immigration](#)



Lessons Learned: a Brief Overview of the Immigration Reform passed in the 99th Congress

As it was for all four attempts, the Republican-majority Senate passed the immigration reform bill with wide margins. During Reagan's tenure the government was divided since the Democrats held a great majority in the House while Republicans held a majority in the Senate. Accordingly, during the 98th Congress, the Speaker Thomas O'Neill, D-Mass., twice vowed to kill the immigration reform bill. First, when co-sponsor Alan Simpson, R-Wyo., proposed a House version of the bill, HR 1510, and second when the Rules Committee reported H Res 519. (CQA84 229-38; CQA86 123-35).

The Rules Committee was forced to create a reconciled version of four unique versions of HR 1510. O'Neill referred the bill with a sequential referral, beginning in the Judiciary Committee and then reported to other germane committees. Although co-sponsor, Romano Mazzoli, D-Ky., was the chairman of the Judiciary subcommittee of Immigration and could have carefully proposed crucial provisions during mark-up, there was a serious lack of time for them. Firstly, due to O'Neill's initial denial to refer Simpson's bill and secondly, due to Congress frequently being at recess for national conventions. With this impediment, each committee created their own version of the bill and reported to the next, leaving the Rules committee to attempt to facilitate negotiations amongst the panels, which failed, and, then, to attempt to reconcile the competing interests on their own. The Rules Committee then decided to have a completely open rule, to which adversaries like Edward Roybal, D-Calif., chairman of the Hispanic Caucus

prepared to kill the bill with hundreds of amendments. Yet, somehow HR 1510 a passed a floor vote but only for the bill reported by the conference committee to be defeated (CQA84 229-38).

In the 99th Congress, however, the efforts of bill sponsors were quite different. When the Judicial Committee received a similar bill to HR 1510, HR 3810, a few Democrats from the Judicial subcommittee on Immigration with Mazzoli negotiated with a leader from the Agriculture Committee for weeks, often postponing or stopping mark-ups in the Judiciary Committee to further negotiate issues. The careful compromise between the competing interest made the cornerstone of HR 3810 about employee's receiving legal-status for working 60-days per year in the agricultural industry, an issue much less contentious amongst House Republicans than employer penalties—the cornerstone of the HR 1510 in the 98th Congress. After long weeks of mark-ups and negotiations, the Judicial Committee reported their version of HR 3810 and it was largely accepted by the subsequent committees. However, the Rules Committee, perhaps to thwart efforts of the opposition attempting something similar to last Congress referred HR 3810 with a closed ruled. This was coolly rejected with huge Republican margins. Henceforth the rule was maintained as semi-open, and the House passed HR 3810 and, then, the Senate version reported by the conference committee. The last hurdle was from Senator Phil Gramm, R-TX, who held the Senate from having unanimous consent and lectured the chamber until they passed a post-committee adjustment to remove an amendment which was too costly according to

President Ronald Reagan. Once past this, Reagan signed S 1200 into law on October 17th 1986 (CQA86 123-35).