

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

May 17, 1979

HAITI UPDATE FROM CONGRESSMAN LEHMAN

The following is an update on progress my Congressional Office has been making in an attempt to find a comprehensive solution to the Haitian refugee problem in South Florida. The office has concentrated on the following areas:

1) As a result of discussions held last week, the Immigration and Naturalization Service has agreed to allow Haitian refugees to obtain work permits while awaiting final determination on their asylum cases. In the opinion of the South Florida CETA Consortium there is a sufficient number of entry jobs that exist to absorb the small number of Haitian refugees in question. It should also be pointed out that this assimilation could be accomplished with little or no effect on the present Dade County labor market. We also have requested that the INS stop "voluntary" departures until every refugee has had access to free counsel and received due process under the law.

The INS assured us that the refugees wouldn't be detained if reliable sponsors could be found. The

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Archdiocese of Miami agreed to provide this sponsorship and recent refugees have not been subjected to long intervals in jail.

2) We are continuing an effort to develop an A.I.D. financed program to help ease deported Haitians back into their own society. CARITAS, a Catholic voluntary organization, seems willing to investigate the possibility of providing temporary shelter, food, counseling and financial help to those Haitians deported from the United States.

3) We will be submitting a report of our findings from our recent trip to Haiti to the Subcommittee on Foreign Operations containing recommendations that economic aid to Haiti be redirected to the poorest section (Northwest Province) where the highest number of refugees flee from.

4) We have brought together Metro Dade County, Florida's Health and Rehabilitation Service, the Christian Community Services Administration, the Haitian Refugee Center and the Catholic Services Bureau to conduct a joint effort in outlining a demonstration program proposal to be presented to the Community Service Administration. This program would be responsible for providing social services for Haitians

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awaiting final determination on their asylum cases.

We will keep you informed on all further actions involving the plight of the Haitian Refugees. Please contact Marsha Runningen, Sergio Bendixen, Pete Bidney or Patrice Trapp of my staff for any further information.

Addition to Haitian Refugee Update:

On Wednesday, May 16, INS told the media that work authorizations would not be granted to the Haitians, contrary to what Commissioner Castillo had told Congressman Lehman.

On Monday, May 21, Congressman Lehman met with Mr. David Yeres, Deputy Associate Attorney General, to further discuss the work permit situation.

Mr. Yeres stated that the policy of the Justice Department is not to give work authorizations for two primary reasons. First, there is the fear that allowing Haitians in Miami to work would send a signal to Haiti and encourage an even greater degree of immigration in the future. Second, the Justice Department was of the opinion that adjudication of the political asylum claims would begin soon and would end the problem within a relatively short period of time. In that case, it was pointless to give work permits if the refugees would only be in Miami for another 30 to 60 days.

The Congressman disagreed with Mr. Yeres's analysis of the problem and said he would continue to press for the work authorizations.

On Thursday, May 24, Congressman Lehman met with members of the Congressional Black Caucus to discuss this dilemma. The full caucus intends to take action in support of the granting of work permits.