Congressional activity in the immigration and nationality field was entered during this session upon the McCarran and Walter Omnibus Immigration and Nationality bills S. 2550 and H.R. 5678, which became Public Law No. 111, 82nd Congress, and the Humphrey-Lehman and Roosevelt Bills (S. 2812 and H.R. 7032). These bills completely revised and codified all the existing immigration and naturalization laws.

As reported to the last Convention, the McCarran and Walter bills (S.2550 and H.R. 5678) are the result of approximately four years of intensive and exhaustive study of our immigration and naturalization system. First, by a Senate Subcommittee, and later by a joint Senate and House Committee, which included several months of public hearings before the bills were drafted and reported favorably out of the Senate and House Judiciary Committee. Both bills were the same in most respects and contained many significant changes in the immigration and nationality laws, but in general, all such changes adhered closely to the existing immigration and naturalization policies.

The American Federation of Labor testified before the committee in support of many of the proposed revisions, which in our opinion would strengthen the existing laws; however, there were some to which we offered objections.

On the other hand, the Humphrey-Lehman and Roosevelt substitute bills (S.2812 and H.R. 7032) were identical in all respects and contained several major changes which would materially weaken the basic provisions of our protective immigration system. For example:

1. The substitute bills would provide for the use of the 1950 census as a basis for calculating quotas rather than basing quotas on the 1920 census as would the McCarran and Walter bills and the existing law. This change would increase immigration 70,000 annually;
2. It would authorize the pooling and utilization of the unused portions of the quotas now in effect, which would increase immigration into this country another 60 to 70,000 annually and
3. It would allow approximately 600,000 Orientals who are natives of non-quota countries of the Western Hemisphere to become immediately eligible for immigration to the United States on a non-quota basis.

In addition, the substitute bills also contained numerous other proposed changes which clearly departed from the principles of our present long standing immigration and naturalization policies.

Major controversies developed in Congress when the McCarran and Walter Omnibus bill (S. 2550 and H.R. 5678) was being considered by both Houses of Congress. Fundamentally, the issue was whether this country should retain its tight limitations and regulations on immigration and naturalization or adopt a new policy to admit more immigrants and relax exclusion and deportation provisions of existing laws.

These two conflicting views were discussed at great length and despite strong opposition the Walter Omnibus bill, H.R. 5678, passed the House with minor amendments on April 25, 1952, by an overwhelming majority vote of 206 to 68 and the Senate on May 22, 1952, by voice vote.

The Humphrey-Lehman and Roosevelt bills (S.2812 and H.R. 7032) were not offered as a substitute in either House as originally planned, but in substance all of the major provisions were considered in the form of amendments to the Walter bill (H.R. 5678). These amendments were overwhelmingly defeated.

The House and Senate version of H.R. 5678 differed in several respects and a conference was agreed to by both Houses on May 28, 1952. A conference report was filed on June 9, 1952 and was immediately approved by both Houses.

(MORE)
On June 25 the President vetoed H.R. 5678 on the basis that the bill did not go far enough to eliminate the discriminatory features of the existing immigration and naturalization system. It passed the House and the Senate over the Presidential veto on June 27, 1952 by a wide margin and became Public Law No. 131.

In brief, the basic changes contained in the new law are as follows:

1. Eliminates race as a bar to immigration and naturalization, but fixed limitations are provided to prevent an influx of Orientals.
2. Eliminates the discrimination between sexes.
3. Introduces a system of selective immigration by giving a preference to skilled aliens urgently needed in this country.
4. Provides for a more thorough screening of aliens, especially of security risks and subversives.
5. Broadens the grounds for exclusion and deportation of criminal aliens.
6. Safeguards judicial review and provides some changes in the present administrative practice and procedure.
7. Improves the underlying intention of our immigration law regarding the preservation of a family unit.
8. Transfers from Congress to the President of the United States the right to suspend immigration at any time.

In general, the new law (Public Law 131) is undeniably a step forward. Whether it represents a fair answer by the United States to the world population problem is a question that is bound to be debated for a long time to come.