

Sen. Clinton Slams GOP Immigration Bill

By DEVLIN BARRETT

The Associated Press

Wednesday, March 8, 2006; 4:48 PM

WASHINGTON -- Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton, a potential White House candidate in 2008, said Wednesday some Republicans are trying to create a "police state" to round up illegal immigrants.

Clinton, D-N.Y., spoke out on the U.S. immigration policy after largely staying away from an issue that has roiled Congress in recent months and spurred a number of conflicting proposals.

Speaking at a rally of Irish immigrants, Clinton criticized a bill the House passed in December that would impose harsher penalties for undocumented workers.

"Don't turn your backs on what made this country great," she said, calling the measure "a rebuke to what America stands for."

The House measure would make unlawful presence in the United States, which is currently a civil offense, a felony.

Clinton said it would be "an unworkable scheme to try to deport 11 million people, which you have to have a police state to try to do."

She called instead for immigration changes "based on strengthening our borders in order to make us safer from the threat of terrorism."

The senator also sent a four-page public letter to constituents outlining her views on immigration. In the letter, she shied away from specifics but said she does support allowing at least some of the estimated 11 million undocumented workers to earn citizenship.

Such changes should include "a path to earned citizenship for those who are here, working hard, paying taxes, respecting the law, and willing to meet a high bar for becoming a citizen," Clinton wrote.

Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Arlen Specter, R-Pa., has offered legislation that would create separate worker programs: one for illegal immigrants already in the country and another for future immigrant workers.

President Bush has argued for a temporary worker program that would allow illegal immigrants to keep their jobs in hotels, restaurants, nurseries, agriculture and other businesses that depend on low-wage laborers.

Neither effort has gained much momentum, partly due to fierce resistance from others within the GOP.

Last week Specter said emotions on the immigration issue are running high and he has seen "virtually no agreement on anything."