

## February 12, 2005: Back into the shadows - La Prensa- El Diario

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This week was not a good week for immigrants. First, a human rights commission found that people who flee their countries to escape persecution in most cases are treated like criminals when they arrive here. Then on Thursday the House of Representatives voted in favor of severely tightening immigration laws. The legislators voted to make it easier for judges to expel immigrants seeking asylum here. And they voted to prevent states from issuing drivers' licenses to undocumented immigrants. The report from the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom earlier this week said that some of the problems with the asylum process "may result in the improper removal of refugees to countries where they may face persecution." Those problems would be compounded if this bill is approved by the Senate and becomes law. The crackdown on refugees seeking asylum could return people to abuse, torture, even death. Democrats, Amnesty International and other groups that opposed the legislation said Congress had already ordered the states to work with the departments of Homeland Security and Transportation to set a national standard for driver's licenses. But, invoking the powerful memory of Sept. 11, supporters of the bill said the legislation is necessary to prevent another terrorist attack. And so we have a president who in the early days of his administration proposed a guest worker program that would give some relief and recognition to undocumented immigrants, but whose plan is now being sabotaged by fellow Republicans who say they won't vote for the guest worker program unless the ban on drivers' licenses is approved first. The message is clear. The Republicans who control the House and Senate want to make immigration laws stricter, no matter what. It doesn't matter that it is better for public safety to have immigrants with drivers' licenses, registration and insurance. It doesn't matter that a compassionate policy towards refugees will keep our fellow human beings safe from persecution. Mean politics is chasing immigrants back into the shadows in fear. And that should be scary for us all.