

Hello, and welcome back. I'm Jim Tedder in Washington. Let's learn some American English and find out some interesting things about our world at the same time. Today we hear about illegal immigration in the United States. This is about people who have come to live in America, but have not obeyed the country's citizenship laws.

Then, we have another story about the U.S. The highest court in the land has just decided that minority students may not get the help they have been given for years, when it comes to getting into college.

Immigration and education ...two very important subjects ...presented in the Learning English style, are coming your way.

The United States has expelled about two million illegal immigrants in the five years since Barack Obama has been president. Some Americans say the Obama administration is too aggressive in enforcing immigration law. But others say it has not been aggressive enough.

Greg Chen is with the American Immigration Lawyers Association. He says the Obama administration is expelling illegal immigrants from the country in record numbers.

“Those numbers, under both President Bush and Obama, have increased steadily in the past decade and are currently at a real high point. So overall, it’s important to recognize that the administration has been incredibly robust in its enforcement practices.”

But others say the number of people being expelled is down. Jon Ferre works for the Center for Immigration Studies.

“What we need to see is a serious commitment to immigration enforcement. We need to see deportation numbers actually going up, instead of going down, as they are now. But thus far, the White House just doesn’t seem all that serious about immigration enforcement.”

How can the same numbers be seen so differently? Because of the difference between what the government calls “returns” and “removals.” The number of returns – immigrants seized at the border and sent back home – has dropped over the past 10 years. But the number of removals has risen to an all-time high. The term removals means immigrants who have been officially expelled and barred from returning to the United States.

Jon Ferre is concerned that the combined total of returns and removals is down.

“So if you’re looking at this idea of removals, which is a type of deportation, the numbers do appear to be going up slightly. But if you look at overall deportation numbers, which is removals plus returns, which occur along the border, you see that the numbers are actually going down.”

But Greg Chen says the government is still taking steps against illegal immigration.

“The thing to recognize is that President Obama has increased the border presence and he has made the actual outcomes, the consequences of having been apprehended and deported out of the country, more severe by having a greater number of removals.”

Jim Tom Haynes has worked for a long time as an immigration lawyer. He says fewer new deportation cases are going to immigration courts. Such courts, he adds, already have far more cases than they can deal with.

“The cases that do get into the court are taking years to get through. So I think that you have fewer deportations now simply because the courts can’t process all this work.”

The debate over whether more or less enforcement is needed is likely to influence any effort to reform the U.S. immigration system. It may also affect the result of the congressional elections in November.

Highest Court Makes Major Ruling on Education

The United States Supreme Court ruled in an affirmative action case last week. The Court said the state of Michigan has a right to stop public colleges and universities from considering a person's race when they decide which students to admit. VOA national correspondent Jim Malone has been following the case. June Simms has his report.

The Supreme Court agreed with the right to Michigan voters to bar public colleges and universities from considering race on admissions decisions. Michigan voters approved the ban as an amendment to the state's constitution in 2006.

Affirmative action programs have long sought to help racial and ethnic minorities compete and gain acceptance to American colleges and universities. But over the years, such programs have also been the subject of much political debate.

Suzanna Sherry is a law professor at the Vanderbilt Law School in Tennessee. She says reaction to the decision may be limited because the court was concerned mainly about the right of voters to express their opinion.

“What the court held is that the voters of Michigan are allowed to decide whether they want affirmative action or not, and that’s really not a ruling on affirmative action. It’s a case about whether affirmative action is required, and the action is no. It’s not required. People can decide, the people of Michigan, can decide not to engage in it.”

The Supreme Court voted six-to-two to support the ban. Justice Sonia Sotomayor was one of the two justices in the minority. She said judges should face the racial inequality that exists in the United States, and not just sit back and wish it away.

The American Civil Liberties Union also criticized the ruling. The group said the Michigan law “unfairly” keeps students from asking universities to consider race in their admissions decisions.

But a group of conservative African-Americans praised the decision. The group is called Project 21. It said the ruling moved the country closer to the ideas expressed by the former civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr.

California and Washington State have voter-approved laws banning affirmative action in education admissions. A few other states also have laws or executive orders barring race as a consideration.

Bisi Okubadejo is a lawyer. She has represented colleges and universities in civil rights cases. She predicts limited legal effects from the Supreme Court ruling.

“It’s likely that this action by the Supreme Court will bolster other groups that continue to file similar suits. It is not representing a step forward with regard to the use of race, but taken in context I think that any negative effects on diversity and the use of race on campus has already occurred in the states where voters have spoken at the polls.”

Supporters of affirmative action programs say they have helped many minorities. But they note that the number of African-American and Hispanic students has dropped at the University of Michigan since the ban took effect. I'm June Simms.

And I'm Jim Tedder in Washington. Before we step aside for more Learning English programs, we invite you to have a piece of birthday cake as we celebrate the birth anniversary of one of America's greatest song writers and performers. On this date in 1899, not far from where I am sitting, Edward Kennedy "Duke" Ellington was born.

He started playing music professionally when he was 17. He is, perhaps, best known as the leader of a big band that played his beautiful, complex, and sophisticated kind of jazz. Duke wrote for motion pictures, operas, ballets, and Broadway shows. When "Duke" died in 1974, one of VOA's own was at his funeral. Willis Conover was there to say goodbye to his good friend.

So we will leave you with the song that “Duke” and Willis made famous. The title says the quickest way to get to Harlem, then the home of so many great jazz clubs in New York City, was to “Take the A Train.”

