

AP revises policy on use of 'illegal' in reference to immigrants

By U.S. News and World Report

The Associated Press decreed last week that the term "illegal immigrant" is no longer appropriate to describe people who reside in the United States without legal permission.

An update to the AP's influential stylebook was blasted out in an email to subscribers of the guide's online version, saying in part, "Except in direct quotes essential to the story, use illegal only to refer to an action, not a person: illegal immigration, but not illegal immigrant."

In a blog post the AP's senior vice president and executive editor, Kathleen Carroll, elaborated that the news organization "had in other areas been ridding the Stylebook of labels" and ultimately decided it was best to only label specific behaviors as illegal.

Debate over the term is highly political. Opponents of illegal immigration fear softening the language is a move to subtly shift the policy debate over immigration reform away from enforcing current immigration laws.

Maricopa County, Ariz., Sheriff Joe Arpaio is one of the nation's foremost anti-illegal immigration hawks. Arpaio told *U.S. News* Wednesday, "If a person enters the United States illegally, that's how we should refer to their status and not try to soften the crime of entering illegally by calling it something else."

William Gheen, president of Americans for Legal Immigration, told the *Los Angeles Times* that the AP's "Big Brother" style

update was “political correctness on steroids.” Gheen told the Times his group will begin using the term “illegal invader.” On Tuesday evening late-night TV host Jay Leno joked that he would use the term “undocumented Democrats.”

The AP previously defended its use of the term “illegal immigrant.”

AP Deputy Managing Editor Tom Kent wrote in an October 2012 memo excerpted by the Poynter Institute: “Terms like ‘undocumented’ and ‘unauthorized’ can make a person’s illegal presence in the country appear to be a matter of minor paperwork. Many illegal immigrants aren’t “undocumented” at all; they may have a birth certificate and passport from their home country, plus a U.S. driver’s license, Social Security card or school ID. What they lack is the fundamental right to be in the United States.”

Following the AP’s Tuesday announcement, the public editor of the *New York Times* disclosed that it too was preparing to announce a revision this week to its stylebook entry for the term “illegal immigrant.” That change “will probably be more incremental” and introduce a more nuanced offering of terminology, rather than an outright ban on the term, according to the *Times*.