

Center for Community Change

Moderator: Wade Henderson
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1:00 PM ET

Operator: Good day ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to your immigration reform conference call. At this time, all participants are in a listen only mode. Later, we will conduct a question and answer session and instructions will follow at that time. If anyone should require assistance during the conference please press than zero on your touch-tone telephone. As a reminder, this conference is being recorded.

It is my pleasure to turn the conference over to your host, Mr. Wade Henderson, President of Leadership Conference on Civil Rights. Sir you may begin.

Wade

Henderson:

Thank you operator. And again, good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. I'm Wade Henderson, President of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights. The Leadership Conference is the nation's leading Civil and Human Rights Coalition with 200 National Organizations, working to build an America that's as good as its ideals.

I'm joined today by representatives of the Civil Rights, Labor, and Religious Communities. All members of the Leadership Conference, to let our voices be heard on the question of immigration reform one of the most urgent and pressing Civil Rights issues of the 21st Century.

Now, most Americans would agree that the nation desperately needs comprehensive immigration reform. And although the senate immigration bill currently under consideration today, is seriously flawed. Many of us agree that it's an important first step on the road to that goal. To be sure, some civil rights organizations openly oppose the senate bill and its present form.

However, for many of us the senate bill represents our best hope in the short term to for legalizing up to 12 million undocumented immigrants in this country, which is a general civil rights imperative.

I need not remind you that the longer congress takes to act on a reasonable immigration initiative, the more pressure builds in local communities in such a way that civil rights for all Americans are threatened.

For example, the local ordinances for bidding landlords to rent to undocumented immigrants affect anyone who is mistaken for an immigrant. And similarly, the rationale for new ID requirements at the ballot box are explained in terms of immigration control, but the impact of course, is much broader. The status quo is not neutral with respect to civil rights. And we need -- but we also need reform, which does not harm our most cherished values as a nation.

Now, we believe that additional changes to the proposed senate immigration bill are needed before the civil rights community could endorse any pending legislation. These changes include strengthening the reduction of family backlogs and stronger protections for U.S. and immigrant workers alike. As well as, repair to the damage done to due process and civil liberties by previous initiatives.

To discuss these issues with more specificity we'd been joined by leaders of the progressive, national organizations most directly involved in the immigration debate. I'll introduce them in the order in which they will speak. Linda Chavez-Thompson, Executive Vice President, AFL-CIO. Eliseo Medina, National Vice President, Service Employees International Union. Cecilia Munoz, Senior Vice President and Director of Policy, the National Council of La Raza. Karen Naraski, President of the Asian American Justice Center. Kevin Appleby, a spokesperson for Immigration Reform for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. And finally Deepak Bhargava, Executive Director of the Center for Community Change.

Now, before I call on Linda Chavez-Thompson. Let me just say that advocates for comprehensive immigration reform have been divided on whether the expansion of a temporary worker program is the proper mechanism to address the future flow of foreign workers. Even within the leadership, conference there have been and continue to be policy differences on this critical question. Now, regardless of such differences however, we believe that there should be unanimity as to the worker protections that must accompany any temporary worker program.

Accordingly, we developed a set of principles with regard to temporary worker programs. Linda Chavez-Thompson of course, of the AFL-CIO. And Eliseo Medina of the Service Employees International Union, whose organizations were instrumental in crafting these principles, can talk more about them. But I want to make clear that by endorsing these principles, the leadership conference is not endorsing a new temporary worker program as the preferred method of addressing the future flow of workers in the United States. Nor are we objecting to the creation of new programs.

Now, I recognize that our constituency groups have different views on the role that temporary worker programs have on a comprehensive immigration reform initiative. But rather our statement of principles are recommendations of what we believe to be the essential fixes to the current temporary worker programs and therefore, fundamental protections that should be included in any non-immigrant program.

It's clear that the senate deal comes nowhere close to satisfying these principles with respect to worker protections that are far from adequate and a temporary forever requirement that denies workers who labor in these programs, the chance to become fully integrated members of our communities.

And so with no further ado, let me introduce Linda Chavez-Thompson. Linda?

Linda Chavez-
Thompson:

Thank you Wade. I am delighted to be joining good friends and allies in the struggle for economic justice, to talk about one of the most important and challenging issues of our time, immigration reform.

There should be no doubt in anyone's mind that the civil rights community is united in the struggle for immigration reform. Immigrant rights are civil rights, immigrant rights are workers rights. Our common goal is comprehensive immigration reform. Our broken immigration system has created a two-tiered labor market in which employers are able to force millions of undocumented workers to labor in substandard conditions to the detriment of all U.S. workers. A real fix to this broken system must address the real roots of the prices and protect all workers in a human and just manner.

Unfortunately, the compromised deal that was announced last week and which was introduced in the senate today does not satisfy those principles. The framework of the senate compromise represents a radical departure from long-standing U.S. immigration policy, which has always factored the reunification of families and has protected workers by limiting the size and scope of guest-worker programs and restricting their applicability to seasonal or temporary work needs.

By contrast, the senate compromise includes a massive guest worker program that would allow employers to import hundreds of thousands of temporary workers every year to perform permanent jobs throughout the economy. As Wade has mentioned before -- earlier this LCCR has developed a set of fundamental principles for worker protections in temporary worker programs. I'm sure that Wade will make a copy available for anyone who wishes to have one.

Those principles highlight the substantial problems that exist with current temporary worker programs. Where workers are exploited and employers profits substantially from that exploitation and are able to drive down wages and work place standards. The senate compromise doesn't include any of the fundamental protections outlined in the LCCR (inaudible) of principles. Instead it massively expands the model of the failed H2B (ph) program.

Finally, the suppose fast to legalization in the senate compromise will exclude millions of workers and thus ensure that America will have two classes of workers. All of one of which can exercise workplace rights. As long as this two-tiered system exists, all workers will suffer because employers will have available a ready pool of labor that they can exploit to drive down wages, benefits, health and safety protections, and (inaudible) the workplace standards. This is hardly the kind of comprehensive immigration reform that will improve the plight of either U.S. or foreign workers or their families.

We will continue to work with our allies in congress and with the civil rights and immigrant communities to achieve fair and human immigration reform. Thank you.

Wade
Henderson:

Thank you Linda. And now, let me call on Eliseo Medina, Vice President of the Service Employees International Union. Eliseo?

Eliseo Medina:

Thank you very much Wade and I too am please to be joining with all our friends and allies from labor, from civil rights, and community organizations to speak about this issue which is vital for America.

And let me say at the outset that from our perspective, there is very -- there is positive aspects to this bill. That we are pleased to see the re-unification portion is important so that people can be able to re-unite with the family members. The possibility of 11 to 12 million people having the opportunity to legalize their status. The inclusion of the egg (ph) jobs and the Dream Act I think are particularly important.

I want to commend the senators for having gotten it this far, but that still falls short from comprehensive immigration reform. And let me just say from the offset that in the labor movement we are all united around the principle that all workers in this country regardless of immigration status ought to have the full protection of our labor, civil, and employees laws. And what that means to us is that our program that just repeats the failures of the past, like the (inaudible) programs are not going to solve the problem that we have with undocumented immigration.

And specifically, let me mention a couple of things that we would like to see the congress fix on this proposal before them. One is this concept that temporary means temporary. And that people can only come to the U.S. for two years, but they must perform for one year, return for two years then go home for another year and return for a final three years. It's flawed because what will happen is that people are going to come to this country because of economic necessity and if they are going to limited in this way, no opportunities, or past of residency, many of them would just simply overstay their Visas and add themselves to a new undocumented pool. So that regardless of how successful we would be in legalizing the current undocumented pool, we would be building a new one. And then in ten or fifteen or twenty years we would be back having the same debate with a whole new set up, undocumented workers.

From our prospective, we need to fix this immigration system so that we don't have to keep revisiting it every ten or twenty years and we have a window of opportunity to fix it now. We hope and continue to work with the congress and other allies to make sure that we don't founder this opportunity. Thank you Wade.

Wade

Henderson: Thank you, Eliseo. Our next speaker is Cecilia Munoz, Senior Vice President with the National Counsel of La Raza. Cecilia?

Cecilia Munoz: Thank you very much Wade and NCOLR is also very proud to be associated with the comments of my colleagues and the civil rights community participating in this call. You know we're in absolute agreement with respect to what the problems are in this bill. And I want to just highlight that we're also in agreement with respect to where we want to get ultimately with an immigration reform. Just to echo Wade's introductory comments.

We need a result on this issue and we need it to be the best possible result. Our communities right now are dealing with you know it could be an extraordinary impact of very harsh immigration raids which have separated parents from their children with extraordinary exploitation in the workplace as well as high level of workplace injuries and other kinds of abuses because of their undocumented status and their vulnerability in the work force.

And as Wade mentioned our communities are being faced with local ordinances and other kinds of legislation at the state and city council level which are responding to the tension around the

immigration issue, but which have an impact which affects not only the civil rights and the general rights of immigrants, but really of anybody who's perceived as being an immigrant. And that is creating tension in our community that's creating real harm in our communities and that is a status, along with the fact that there are deaths at the U.S. Mexico boarder at a rate of more than an average of one a day. Those are all things that we need to address and that we expect from congress to address as it takes up an immigration reform.

Essential to that reform is a program to put undocumented immigrants on a path to citizenship. One of the more positive elements of this proposal is that it contains from the standpoint of the cut off date quite a generous legalization program. And that undocumented immigrants who are in the country as of January 1st of this year would qualify. That's an important element of this bill. The inclusion of the Add Jobs bill, which would legalize farm workers, is important to this bill. As is the inclusion of the Dream Act. Those are things that we have all been working on for many years, and that we are eager to see become law. But as you heard we obviously also have major concerns with the fact that the temporary worker program proposed in this bill does not provide a path -- a meaningful pathway to citizenship. You've heard us all talk about the changes to the legal immigration system which are unacceptable from our standpoint.

Our message to the Senate is that these things need to change. We are expecting a very vigorous debate on amendments, starting this afternoon and we intend to be a very active part of that debate. We are hopeful of making changes to this bill. We are hopeful of a process in the House of Representatives that -- we're hopeful that the House will take a different look at these issues and that we will be able to make further progress as the bill proceeds through the House.

But it's also clear that we are saying to the congress that failing to act on the immigration issue is not an acceptable solution either. We need to move a bill forward but it needs to be a good bill. It needs to serve the interest of our country and the interest of these communities. And the principles that we've been part of developing with our friends at the leadership conference are very important guidelines to help us get there, to make sure that immigration reform does the job that we need for it to do, both in protecting the rights of immigrants and for the broader community in the U.S. but also, in terms of protecting the rights of all works in the United States. And we intend to work together to move those goals forward as this debate proceeds.

Wade

Henderson: Thank you Cecilia. Our next speaker is Karen Naraski, President of the Asian American Justice Center. Karen?

Karen Naraski: Thank you Wade. The Asian American Justice Center is very pleased to join our colleges who are all working hard to improve the legislation during this week's debate. It is a historic opportunity to create an immigration system that will actually function in our nation's best interest. And we're hearted by Senator Reid's statements of concern about the family provisions and believe that a majority of senators will share his concern. And that they also want a workable and effective solution to undocumented immigration.

Now, under this plan as you've heard, there's a legalization program with a path to citizenship and that's a serious step forward. However, we join with labor in our concern about there being no path to citizenship for temporary workers. And also, we are concerned that it further erodes to process protections.

Finally, we're most concerned about the radical restructuring of the legal immigration system that drastically cuts the ability of family members to re-unite. As currently framed, we believe the family system will not solve the problem of undocumented immigration. To address that problem we need to take care of the whole family backlog and right now this bill only recognizes people in the backlog up to May 2005.

And we also need to have an adequate number of Visa's in a system that recognizes the strength of family ties because a system that does not recognize a strength in family ties is going to result in continued undocumented immigration.

So for example, the proviso cuts in half the ability of U.S. citizens to bring in their parents. And would build up a backlog of 100,000 in just two years. The proposal would also eliminate categories for siblings and adult children of U.S. Citizens. And the new system that they would be thrown into does not really give significant weight to family ties. The proponents have said it gives up to 10%, which is simply not true. You only get 4 points for being a sibling and a maximum of six or seven for being an adult child out of 100. And those points don't even count unless you get more than 50 points to begin with. While we recognize -- well recognizes the need to address some of the 4 ½ million families in the backlog, it does not take care of existing backlog for spouses and minor children of legal permanent residence.

Currently there's a backlog of over 1 million spouses and minor children of legal permanent residents who now must wait often more than five years or more. This is guaranteed to become worse over time because the new bill does not provide any additional Visas that more effectively and accurately reflect the need to reunite these families.

The arbitrary (ph) cutoff date of May 2005 for the backlog of adult children and siblings of U.S. citizens will affect over 800,000 applications. We believe it's unfair, particularly given that the cutoff date for the legalization is January 1, 2007. And the cut off for the employment backlog is the date of enactment. We're working with members of the senate on amendments to address that.

Finally, we believe that senators who want to continue to strengthen our family values and defend fundamental due process principles are stepping up and we're looking forward to working with them to create legislation that's going to celebrate rather than denigrate our family values. Thank you.

Wade

Henderson: Karen, thank you very much. Our next speaker is Kevin Appleby, a spokesperson for the U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops. I know that Kevin was also participating in another conference. Kevin are you here? Can you join us?

Kevin Appleby: I am here.

Wade

Henderson: Wonderful. Terrific. Thank you.

Kevin Appleby: Thank you everyone. Hello. I want to echo my colleagues comments that the U.S. Bishops in the Catholic Church in the United States is committed to get a good just and human compass of

Immigration reform bill. And the Bishops are committed to moving forward in this process to move this compromised proposal into the light of day, and they're confident that once it's fully digested by our elected officials that they will make the appropriate changes to make it a bill that is acceptable in which protects the basic human rights of the person.

We do however, have several concerns have been expressed already but we have concerns about the bill which I'll relate quickly. The first two concerns have to do with the legalization program. And the Bishops are concerned about this because of the justice aspect of it but also because the church will be part of the implementation of a program because migrants will come to us and ask us for our opinion for help to shepard them through the process and we want to be able to say with confidence to them that this is a program which is a program they should participate in and which will not trap them, if you will.

But at this point, we cannot say that with confidence because of several reasons. First of all, it requires an eligible applicant to go all the way home to their country of origin in order to apply for the green card once they're eligible for that green card. We're fearful that, that could place an undue burden on some families. It also creates fear in families that they are going to go overseas - - the head of the household might go overseas and might not be allowed to return. We think this is unnecessary because we think within the program they are required to do several things in order to pay their debt to society including learning English, paying taxes, and paying a fine. So we think that's -- and working for eight years. So we think that, that is sufficient for them to pay their debt and that this unnecessarily complicates the program and could make it unworkable.

We also have grave concerns about the family unity aspect of the program because if the head of a household has a family in the United States, they are legalized with the head of the household but if that family is in Mexico they cannot come and live permanently for at least eight years until that green card application is filed. We think this -- this is -- rewards those who may have -- won't allow more than those who didn't by bringing their families with them they're rewarded and those who stayed at home are not, and that needs to be corrected. They should be allowed to come in upon receiving the provisional VISA that the head of household will receive at the beginning of the program.

Let me of course echo my colleagues concerns about the temporary worker program. The Bishops feel strongly that we do not want to return to the days of prersero (ph). Many of our Bishops were involved in witnessing the abuses of that program and this is a recipe for the same. We need to have a path to citizenship in this program and we need to have stronger worker protections in it order for it to be acceptable.

And finally, I just want to express the deep concern of the Bishops on the elimination of several family preference categories and replacing them with a point system. Which a point system I must say frankly is skewed toward the highly skilled and the highly educated and ultimately those with economic means and against those without economic means. I mean to abandon family base immigration for a point system skewed toward the highly skilled ignores the fact that immigrant families have helped build this nation. They start business, they keep members from government dependency and they invest energy in their new land and we will be forsaking that -- forsaking

their contributions by abandoning them in this way. I mean this is really, truly a radical departure from immigration and legal immigration, as we know it in this country. It would restrict a laborer or a family member who might not have opportunity in their home country from coming to the United States, working hard and achieving the American dream. This is the formula that our immigration system has been built on for 200 years and it served our country well. And now, after eight weeks of negotiation we're going to change that drastically and implement a point system which hasn't been tested and which will favor only those who have the means to apply and have the skills and the education. We need to look with deep concern and seriously, at what we're doing by implementing this point system. And the Bishops will be pointing that out in the days and months ahead.

We look forward to the fight. We're ready for fight. And we think in the end that the changes will be made that are necessary to make this a just and humane bill. Thank you.

Wade
Henderson:

Kevin, thank you. Our final speaker this afternoon is Deepak Bhargava, Executive Director of the Center for Community Change. Deepak?

Deepak
Bhargava:

Thanks so much Wade and thanks for the Leadership Conference for the extraordinary role it's playing on this issue as on so many others. I am actually sitting in a church basement with 30 grassroots immigrant leaders from around the country who are talking about the direction we should head on the legislation that's in front of us. And I just want to highlight very briefly three critical points of agreement that are emerging from that conversation.

First, we really should acknowledge that the proposal is responses to the demands of the immigrant community for many years. The largest mobilizations in American history for a path for citizenship for undocumented workers with particular attention to agricultural workers and students as embodied in the ACT jobs and Dream Act principles. And so we think it's very important that this debate proceed.

Second it -- in order for a bill to meet our principles and the values that Americans hold dear, we have to see substantial changes in this bill as it moves forward particularly to the family preference and to the treatment of any future temporary workers for access to worker protections and a path to citizenship. The immigrant community is watching this debate very, very carefully. They are hopeful, but also cautious and are certainly preparing to make their voices heard as the debate unfolds in congress. But again, I think the key point is we need this debate to happen. There is remarkable levels of suffering in the country in immigrant communities that have to be address but we have to do it right and we have to make sure that these key flaws, major flaws in the senate legislation get addressed that the bill moves forward.

Wade
Henderson:

Deepak, thank you. I think again ladies and gentlemen the leadership conference as you've heard and progressive civil rights organizations joining us today strongly believe that immigration reform is a civil right imperative. We also believe that the nation is up to the task of addressing this issue and addressing it now. We simply hope that congress will seize the opportunity to make real progress while the chance is presented. And we are finished with our formal presentations and would be happy to take questions. Operator, we're happy to take additional questions now.

Operator: Thank you. Ladies and gentlemen, if you have a question or comment at this time please press the number one key on your touch-tone telephone. One moment for question. We have a question from Jamie Weinstein. Please state your affiliation and proceed with your question.

Jamie Weinstein: Next week many members are going to be home for the Memorial Day recess. Do any of your groups plan on doing anything to try to get your views out to the members either through commercials and whatnot to let them know how you feel?

Cecilia Munoz: This is Cecilia. Yes. The quick answer to your question is yes, absolutely. I think you'll see a variety of things from Town Hall meetings to visuals, to calls, to individual meets as well, but yes, I think you can expect the activity around the country to vigorous over the break.

Jamie Weinstein: Is it, I mean is there anything specifically planned, advertisements or anything along those lines that your groups have planned other than informal meetings along those lines?

Cecilia Munoz: There may well be, I don't think that plans from the national groups have finalized yet. We're sort of focusing on events for this week but we do know that local organizations around the country are mobilizing very forcefully around these issues and I think you can expect quite a bit of activity.

Jamie Weinstein: Thank you.

Operator: Thank you. Our next question comes from William Gibson. Please proceed with your question.

William Gibson: Hi, I have -- I'll ask a politically pragmatic question. Would those of you with objections prefer no bill to what you consider an imperfect bill here? And by raising objections instead of getting behind the compromises that stand, are you at risk of jeopardizing the bill as a whole.

Wade

Henderson: I'll begin answering that question then ask my colleagues to join. It's Wade Henderson with the Leadership Conference. I'm certain we're not going to let the perfect become the enemy of the good. And certainly, as I've said we believe that immigration reform, comprehensive fair effective reform is a civil rights imperative. But we also believe that you know, any bill is not necessary a good bill. And so while we urgently want comprehensive reform, we want fair and effective reform and we do think that the senate bill offers us an opportunity to get from where we are today to where we'd like to be in the end. We'll have to evaluate that as the process goes forward. We're certainly going to be supporting amendments that we hope will improve the bill. But this process is really just beginning. We're not at a point now where we have to I think make that determination.

Operator: Thank you. Our next question comes from Elana Shore. Please pronounce your affiliation and proceed with your questions.

Elana Shore: My affiliation -- my question is about the debate on the quest-worker programs that will start today. Senator Dorgan has an amendment to kill the program out right. I'm curious if you folks here also don't want the perfect be the enemy of the good on quest-workers or whether you'd rather have no program than a program that you believe has little protections.

Cecelia Munoz: Well, we're hopeful, this is Cecelia, of getting to a program that actually has protections and has a pathway to citizenship. I'm not -- we don't know what the outcome of the Dorgan amendment will be but I think you can expect a vigorous debate on the temporary worker program, its labor protections, and the notion of a pathway to citizenship throughout the senate debate.

- Linda Chavez-Thompson: The AFL-CIO, this is Linda Chavez-Thompson. The AFL-CIO has stood against worker programs that does not have a past to citizenship and none of the programs that are being proposed in this legislation has that. It is just another (inaudible) program and we definitely are apposed to that.
- Eliseo Medina: And from my perspective, this Eliseo Medina from SEIU. You know, we believe that in order for this to work that you need a new kind of program not just a federal program. So we're going to engage in the discussion and we want to make it absolutely the best that we can so that we're not repeating the mistakes of the past. As Wade says, it's premature to say at this point, what the outcome is going to be. One thing we do know for sure is what we think will work and we have an opportunity to rate our ideas and our issues and we're going to do that.
- Wade Henderson: Next question.
- Operator: Thank you. Our next question comes from Dena Buins. Please announce your affiliation and proceed with your question.
- Dena Buins: I'm from the Orange County Register. This is following up on the questions about the Dorgan amendment. The people who devised this compromise say that if that amended would to pass then the bill would actually be killed and that would kill a major portion of this legislation and might make the whole deal fall apart. Are you willing to see that happen or are you suggesting that people vote so the Dorgan amendment which would cut the program in half in terms of numbers, as any of the other fixes but if the Dorgan amendment goes through and that stops the process dead in its tracks, what happens then?
- Cecelia Munoz: This is Cecilia. I would note that the Dorgan amendment was offered last year and failed. The (inaudible) amendment passed overwhelmingly last year that reduced the size of the temporary worker program to 200,000. We don't know what's going to happen on the floor this afternoon. I think whatever happens is unlikely to be last word on the temporary worker program. There will be amendments offered this week and next week. And what I can say for sure is that the people on this call will be working to make sure that if there's a temporary worker program in this bill that it conforms to the principles you heard us talk about including strong labor protections and including a pathway to citizenship. And that's you know, we will -- that's the process we will be engaged in through the consideration of this bill.
- Dena Buins: Right. But what I'm wondering about is that if in fact you're supporting the Dorgan amendment and are urging the senators that you deal with to support the Dorgan amendment or are you concerned that if that one was actually to pass that that would basically stop this compromise dead in its tracks.
- Cecelia Munoz: Yeah, I guess what I'm saying at least to the latter part is that it's not clear that, that would be the final word with respect to a temporary worker program.
- Dena Buins: Okay.
- Wade Henderson: Next question and could I ask operator if everyone would state their press affiliation as well please.

Operator: Thank you. Our next question comes from Mark Grunenberg. Please sir state your press affiliation and proceed with your question.

Mark Grunenberg: This is Mark Grunenberg from Press Associates Union News and my question basically is for both Eliseo and Linda. In the version that the senate passed last year, there was an explicit provision that in so many words wiped out that Supreme Court decision four years ago. The one that yanked labor rights from many undocumented worker. I have not seen any -- I have not seen anything about that in this -- in any version of this legislation. Is that explicit provision in there?

Eliseo Medina: This is Eliseo. From my point of view, the Hoffman Plastics decision was about undocumented workers. What we are hoping on is making everyone of these workers that will be coming in, in the future legal by generally the undocumented flow into a documented status that then will get full labor rights. So that's what our goal is. And if we accomplish that then that would be a way of dealing with Hoffman Plastics.

Wade Henderson: Linda are you there? Hello? I'm not certain whether Linda Chavez-Thompson is still there. I knew that she had to take -- catch an airplane this afternoon so she may have left. To the reporter who asked the question though about Hoffman Plastics. Let me say that, that's a 2002 Supreme Court decision. Hoffman Plastics versus the National Labor Relations Board that decided that undocumented workers who were often exploited on the job were not able to get back pay if they were dismissed in their efforts to form unions. And certainly, from the perspective of the Civil Rights community that, that decision has had broad impact that not only affected the undocumented but also unlawfully admitted and citizen workers as well. We're committed to overturning the Hoffman Plastics decision. It is not in the bill currently, we hope it will be addressed as we move forward both in the Senate and in the House. Next, question please. Thank you.

Operator: Thank you. Our next question comes from Sean Higgins. Please state your press affiliation and proceed with your question.

Sean Higgins: Yes, I'm with Investors Business Daily Newspaper. My question is regarding the family reunion provisions. My understanding is this is going to take effect and you can correct me if I'm wrong or if the content of the bill has changed recently. That those don't take effect until after the backlog is cleared which is likely to be several years, possibly even a decade.

Unidentified Speaker: That's true.

Sean Higgins: Doesn't that then suggest that I mean if -- we're talking about possibly a future congress and possible future presidency doesn't that sort of take some of that impact out of that argument. I mean it seemed to be --

Cecilia Munoz: Actually not because the issue is that some of the backlogs are like five or six years. Some of the backlogs are ten to twenty years. And what the bill does is it provides addition visas to try to clear up part of the backlog. And the part of the backlog that they clear up is only the backlog for applications before May 2005. For people who applied after May 2005, they would be strung into the point system. And the point system actually begins functioning but it only has 33,000 feeds

until the backlog is finished. So clearly, if family members are competing with people who are H1B employment based and are switching to get permanent VISAS. They won't be able to come in and new people applying won't be able to apply. So we are still concerned about the fact that while we applied the recognition that the backlog needs to come in, we're very concerned about both the cut off date and the fact that they are not doing anything about the legal permanent resident spouse and minor children backlog or adding additional VISAS into the future for that category which is already extremely backlogged. So it's a problem.

Wade
Henderson: Next question operator.

Operator: Thank you. Our next question comes from Ronald Burnstein. Please state your press affiliation and proceed with your question sir.

Ronald
Burnstein: Hi, it's Ron Burnstein, LA Times. I guess Mr. Appleby raised this but Cecilia just touched on it as well. I'm interested in what you would say to those that would argue that whenever the point system goes into effect down the road, that it is in our national interest to emphasize folks with advanced skills as we look at the future immigrant pool stretching out into the future. Why would it not be in our interest to emphasize bringing in people who might contribute the most economically?

Cecilia Munoz: This is Cecilia. I guess I'll start by saying that the reason that our colleagues in the business community are so concerned about it is because essentially, right now under current law they the ability to petition for highly skilled people specifically after they have you know gone through a number of groups and identified the employee that they want to bring in and petition for a VISA specifically for them. We're doing away with that system and as well as most of the family preference system. And instead saying to those employers, well you can't necessarily get a VISA for the guy you hired but we've let in a whole bunch of smart people and we hope you like one of them because that's what you got to work with. It doesn't necessarily serve our economic interest directly when -- Canada has a similar system. It doesn't replace their family based system, it's a supplement to their family based system. But because there's no direct connection to the workplace, what ends up happening in Canada through their point system is that they bring in a lot of highly qualified people who aren't necessarily getting good access to the job market and they end up driving taxi's. You know on the face of it, it seems like it could be a good thing to bring in highly skilled people, but then if you look at the way those people might ultimately intersect with our economy and meet our employment needs, it turns out not to be the best mechanism for doing it. Our country's been served very well by -- as Karen mentions the family integration system where in fact the bulk of immigrants who are successfully integrated into the labor market, came in as family members of U.S. Citizens. So it's not clear that this is something, which is broke, which needs to be fixed.

Karen Naraski: And I would actually -- this is Karen. I would add that your question begins with a false premise that we can't in fact increase the number of employment based VISAS without cutting family immigration. As Cecilia points out the Senate is using Canada as a model. Canada did not reduce the number of immigrants coming in through family in order to get a majority of their

VISAS coming for employment based. They were just able to increase the employment side and given the changing demographics of our country, that I'm sure you're very well familiar with baby boomers retiring, there's in fact need for greater immigration. So those two things don't need to be inconsistent. You can have strong family based immigration and still increase the percentage that is going to employment base.

Kevin Appleby: This is Kevin. I would just add and this is probably a minority view, but we're a global organization, the Catholic Church, so we might have a different view than other on this. But I mean do we really want a system where we're siphoning off the best and the brightest from countries around the world, including developing countries who may need their expertise in the years ahead in order to develop. I mean in that in our long-term national interest that we're recruiting only the best and brightest from all the countries in the world, and the rich get rich and the poor get poor. That's a question I think we need to consider.

Eliseo Medina: This is Eliseo. Let me just weight in I'm not viewing it from the global perspective that Kevin is, our Union represents nursing home workers, homecare workers, janitors, and many of our allies represent construction workers, people that work in factories. And let me just tell you in about five to ten years when all the other baby boomers retired, there's going to be great need for somebody to provide nursing home care, homecare, and a number of other occupations that are going to be extremely vital. So I don't think that this country in itself can survive with just the balance of highly educated workers. You need a combination of all these workers to keep the economy going. So I think it would be a mistake to assume that let's just bring in nothing but PhD's and what about all those other jobs that will still need to be done.

Wade
Henderson: Next question operator.

Operator: Thank you. Our next question comes from Edward SiFuentes with the North County Times.

Edward
SiFuentes: I was wondering if any of your groups are doing anything to help counter some of this public sentiment being wiped up against the bill, particularly through AM radio and some of the other outlets. Is there anything you guys are doing?

Cecilia Munoz: I mean the most specific thing we're doing is continuing. This is something we've all be doing for many years now, is continuing to point out that really most of the criticism is coming from people who are not offering solutions to this problem. While we know the noise on talk, radio is very loud it's also pretty clear it represents a majority of the public. If you look at polls conducted by any number of sources over the last -- actually over the last two years, they consistently show better than 70% support across all demographic sectors of the country in support of comprehensive reform, comprehensive immigration reform along the lines of what we've been talking about. So you know it's not clear that we can do anything about the shouting that's going on but we continue to connect with the -- a public which is very hungry for reform and interested in proposals that actually offer real solutions and we think that's the best bet moving forward.

Edward
SiFuentes: Yeah, I would concur with that. I mean polls consistently show 50 to 60% support of the American public to solve this problem. Including a legalization program, which many of the opponents are screaming about. And so the calculation here is whether failing to act is a higher cost than acting. And I think our elected officials feel that they have to act because if they do not

act it will be another three to five years, and the local communities and the state governments will fill the vacuum that they've left behind. The stakes are high here and the attention is on them. They want to get a deal done and I think that will overwhelm any loud opposition although minority that they will hear.

Wade

Henderson: Thanks Kevin. Next question operator.

Operator: Thank you. Our next question comes from Rebecca Logan. Please state your affiliation please.

Rebecca

Logan: Yes, Rebecca Logan from Epicentro Radio. And I'm going to ask the question in Spanish for Cecilia and Eliseo. (Speaking Spanish).

Cecilia Munoz: (Speaking Spanish).

Operator: Thank you. Our next question comes from Hernan Rosenberg. Please state your press affiliation please. (Music) Our next question comes from Tom Brune. Pardon me sir you line is open.

Wade

Henderson: Hello, operator perhaps we should take another question.

Operator: Thank you. Our next question comes from Betty Lyn. Please state your press affiliation please.

Betty Lyn: Hi, Betty Lyn of the World Journal. I'd like to know which senators will offer the family indication amendments and would that be just taking care of the backlog for people who applied after May '05? How about increasing VISA numbers for parents or restoring families (inaudible) this preference?

Karen Naraski: This is Karen Naraski. There's going to be a series of family amendments. They're still being worked out but one of them will be offered by Senators Mendez and Haggel. And that will move up the cut off dates for the backlog for family VISAS to January 1, 2007, which is the same date as the legalization date. There are -- we also are expecting amendments to be offered on for example, the parent -- the new cap on parents, which will be offered by Senator Dodd (ph) and I know he has the republican co-sponsoring of -- that's slipping my mind right now. We do expect work -- we do expect amendments to be offered on some of the point system as well but we don't have the details as of yet.

Operator: Thank you. Our next question comes from Nicole Gaouette. Please state your press affiliation please.

Nicole Gaouette: Hi, Los Angeles Times. I have a question for Wade but others can step in. And then a specific question for Kevin. The question for Wade and the group is that you mentioned that your constituents have different views. I'm wondering if you could talk about some of the differences between the people on the call and where they lie, what they are.

Wade

Henderson: It's an interesting question, Nicole. I'll let those on the call speak for themselves about their individual institutions, but let me say that, the civil rights community is joined on several key points. First, I think we strongly believe as I mentioned earlier that immigration, comprehensive immigration reform is a genuine civil rights imperative. And I said from the outset that legalizing the 12 million, estimated 12 million undocumented workers in the United States for us is a

genuine imperative one that we hope will remain intact in the legislature as it moves forward. But we also recognize that other improvements are really needed and I think there is a genuine unity of view that the family reunification issues, which Karen Naraski and Kevin Appleby discussed, are a hot priority for the civil rights coalition, we want it to be addressed.

Secondly, we strongly believe that protections for workers both U.S. and immigrant workers have to be enhanced, have to be strengthened. Now there are differences of view as I stated on the ethnicity of a temporary worker program as a way of handling future flows. And I think you'll certainly see some real differences within organizations within the civil rights coalition on how those issues should be handled.

But lastly I think there's also unity in our view and concern about I'm handling the problems of civil liberties and due process that resulted from some previous efforts on immigration reform. Those areas of common interest, I think areas of difference are the mono ones that I've eluted to but I think that there is also a real recognition that the opportunity that congress has presented us with a debate on a bipartisan initiated bill is simply too important to ignore. And it's an opportunity to unify the civil and human rights community and wanting to go forward to see how we can improve a bill that we think makes a good start on these issues.

Nicole

Gaouette: Okay, so who on the call doesn't think a temporary worker program is a good idea?

Eliseo Medina: Well let me just say this -- Eliseo Medina from SEIU. I'm not -- I will agree that there ought to be a word temporary attached to this in many ways because (inaudible) accomplish there trying to figure out immigrants in the figure are going to come to this country. And the (inaudible) come for two years and can go home is just ludicrous in my point of view. So I think that the question is more how do we make sure that a: the needs of economy are met while at the same time we are supportive and respectful of workers rights. And I don't necessarily think that you've got to have a loose, loose. I think this can be a win, win if we recognize that there's an imperfect (ph) (inaudible) of the needs of this country and the needs of immigrants.

Nicole

Gaouette: Okay. Kevin can I ask you? You said that you thought people who are admitted -- the heads of household admitted into new VISA program with families back in Mexico or wherever that their families should be allowed to come in as soon as the head of household receives their provisional VISA. I'm just wondering about the fairness of that given that there may be people who legally applied to have their family come in and they would be stuck waiting. And yet, your position is that someone who's entered illegally and whose families outside should be allowed to bring their family in immediately. In spite of the fact that there might be people who have filled out the forms, have paid the lawyers fees, have waiting in line, and are in the same position. I mean I just it (inaudible) to me.

Kevin Appleby: We're not saying it either or. I mean we would support Karen's prescription that the date for backlog reduction should be moved up certainly. And we're not suggesting that these families should get their green card before people who are waiting in line. But we have here -- I'm sorry go ahead. What we have here is a situation where people who are -- who came here, the whole family came here illegally. And they moved here and then they get legalized. The whole family who came illegally is rewarded and the family that stayed behind and the husband or father went is not rewarded. They're going to have to wait for 8 years. And there's a practical aspect of this too. I mean, how many families are going to wait that long to come join their loved one. I mean it's really going to encourage undocumented immigration. And this time it's going to be women and children that are crossing the boarder.

Nicole

Gaouette: They all ready do. But I mean, you know so are you saying that the heads of households here who have families there that those families should go to the end of the green card line then?

Kevin Appleby: Well certainly as the way is constructed they would go to the end of the green card line because the green card line will be taken care of by the time that the VISA population eligible for them.

Nicole

Gaouette: But that's what you don't like.

Kevin Appleby: Well, no we think they should be at the end of the line. What we don't like is that they're going to have to wait in Mexico or wherever they are for eight to thirteen years before they can join the husband, father in the United States.

Cecilia Munoz: It's a much longer wait. This is Cecilia. Because you have to wait until the VISA holder obtains permanent residence before they could petition even petition for their spouses and minor children. And so assuming it takes eight years before they even qualify for legal permanent residence and it may take five years to get everybody through that second line, you're talking about thirteen years before everybody can even petition for their spouses and minor children. It's not practical. It's not workable. And you know we think some families will reunite anyway and it's just a mistake to create a system that people will want to violate if they have the audacity of wanting to live with their spouses and their own children.

Nicole

Gaouette: So you would like to see the provision Visas immediately extended to family outside the country?

Kevin Appleby: Yes.

Cecilia Munoz: To spouses and minor children, yes.

Kevin Appleby: Spouses and minor children.

Nicole

Gaouette: Okay. Thank you.

Wade

Henderson: Operator, the next question. Thank you we have a follow up question from Mark Gruenberg.

Mark

Gruenberg: We haven't mentioned the sixty-four dollar question in all this, which is that the enforcement measures, otherwise known as the feds, go to the head of the line before any of these progressive measures are implemented, at least according to the newspaper reports on the bill. Doesn't this make the whole bill completely unworkable as far as we who advocate for the immigrant community are concerned?

Kevin Appleby: Yeah, this is Kevin. We have concerns about the triggers certainly. What we would advocate is that, first of all, that we have problems with the substance of the wall. And I won't get into that because we've expressed that. But assuming that these triggers go forward we would advocate that there be a time definite set so that it's not delayed for years and years and defector (ph) these programs are delayed for years and years. We would say, you have to do -- if you're going to do this you're going to have to do it within a time certain so that these programs can move forward in

a timely way and not be held hostage to these enforcement provisions which we disagree with, but which are in the bill. So you can't --

Mark

Gruenberg: I use the wall as a symbol by the way. I understand there's a lot more than just the wall. Go ahead Kevin.

Kevin Appleby: Yeah, right. There's more than just the wall but there are several things they have to do which are really things that, that PHS is proven that they can't accomplish within the time period they say they are going to do it. I mean Secretary Churchhoff (ph) says that they're going to be hiring 18,000 boarder patrol agents and bill the wall by the end of 2008. Well, we find that very hard to believe because the track record hasn't demonstrated that. So we would say that, legislatures should put in a date certain that if these things haven't happened that the programs go forward.

Cecilia Munoz: This is Cecilia. I would just add to that, that at least legislation that has been introduced in the house so far, the stride back, which is the bipartisan co-sponsors in the House, takes a much different approach to the triggers. So I think that by the time this debate reaches its conclusion there will be opportunities to revise the triggers that are in the Senate bill in a way, which makes them a little bit more responsible.

Mark

Gruenberg: Could you elaborate on that?

Cecilia Munoz: Well, for example Kevin alluded to the unlikelihood that they're going to be able to hire 18,000 boarder patrol agents and build 300 miles of fence. I mean I think what you're seeing is something that the republican parties to this deal are sealing what they need to say in order to address some of the heat that they're taking. You know it is entirely possible that we'll see a different approach in the House and that this -- as the legislature conversation proceeds that we will end up with something a little different from where we are at the starting point, and that's certainly our goal is to end up somewhere much more workable.

Mark

Gruenberg: Anybody else want to jump in.

Wade

Henderson: No, I think that's a pretty adequate response to a very important question. Next question, operator.

Operator: Our concluding question comes from Bill Butler. Sir please state your press affiliation.

Bill Butler: Sheet Metal Worker's Journal. Since one of the objectives is, legislation is to reduce illegal immigration. Has there been any discussion or consideration of what employers here in the U.S. can do to bid up jobs that would make more Americans apply for that and reduce the illegal immigration?

Wade

Henderson: I'll attempt to answer that. This is Wade Henderson again. Certainly within the deliberations within the Leadership Conference have focused not only on questions related to the temporary worker program but also how to strengthen protections for workers who are already here, both U.S. and immigrant. And I think certainly, there are efforts underway to examine ways of creating a leveled, more level playing field for workers who are here and trying to answer with greater specificity the need for temporary workers in any given field. So I think the answer to your question then yes. And there are still deliberations underway, efforts underway, to try to find

appropriate responses to ensure that workers who are already here have access to job that are available.

Bill Butler: Should incentives be built into that process?

Wade

Henderson: Well, I'm not going to answer that yet, because I do think, I don't want to preclude the discussions that have already taken place between various aspects of the labor movement and the broader civil rights movement within the Leadership Conference. But I do think it is important that we're making a significant step in that regard and the principles that I alluded to earlier, are available for your review. They will be posted on the Leadership Conference website, which can be gotten to at www.civilrights.org. You can download a set of those principles and have an opportunity to review them for yourself. Ladies and gentlemen, I think this concludes our press conference for today. I want to thank my colleagues from the civil rights labor and religious communities for joining in with the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights. Again, they're all members of the coalition but the thank them for the leadership role they're playing on this important debate on immigration reform as a civil rights issue. I want to thank the press for joining in today. I think this has been a spirited discussion and I thank you very much for your interest in the issues. Thanks operator for your help.

Operator: Thank you. Ladies and gentlemen, this does conclude our program for today. Thank you for your participation. You may now disconnect and have a wonderful day.