

# ARIZONANS FOR IMMIGRATION REFORM



## **Concept Paper on Immigration Reform** ***Border Security, Comprehensive Reform, and Economic Recovery*** **July 6, 2010**

As the rest of the nation pulls out of the Great Recession, Arizona remains mired in an economic, political, and social crisis largely of its own making. Although pre-recessionary Arizona ranked among the worst in key social indicators for health care, education, and job readiness, during the Recession, the state dug itself into the worst fiscal crisis in its history, hastened by a meltdown in its unregulated housing industry. Politics at the state legislature has remained paralyzed by partisanship and an ideologically motivated “starve the beast” approach to the state’s budget woes. Yet as the state teetered on the edge of insolvency, and Arizonans became increasingly frustrated with their state government, Arizona’s legislators embraced a new strategy that would deflect the public ire’s toward a different target: immigrants.

There is no question that Arizona is ground zero for our nation’s broken immigration policies. The scarcity of legal avenues for immigration, coupled with tough enforcement-only policies, have channeled migrants through the Sonoran Desert, creating opportunities for smugglers and others who prey on migrants. Although the flow of migrants has waned with the Recession, Arizonans continue to pay a heavy price for federal inaction, and Arizonans are justifiably frustrated with the inability of lawmakers of both political parties in Washington to solve this problem. Federal failure has allowed local demagogues to fan the public’s frustration into a desert storm of controversy, distracting Arizonans from their economic woes with a convenient scapegoat, and creating an issue to boost poll numbers. Arizona’s lawmakers can finally say that they are “doing something” after months of inaction on almost everything else.

But these nativist attacks on immigrants will prove to be more costly than Arizona can bear. The 2008 Employer Sanctions Law left thousands jobless and forced an exodus that in many ways precipitated our foreclosure crisis and deep recession by driving away a critical tax-paying and consumer base. Early indications are that the effects of SB1070 will be far more severe. Driven not only by loss of employment, but also by fear of racial profiling, deportation, and separation from their families, thousands of Latinos are heading for more hospitable American states, taking their labor, their spending power, and their tax contributions with them. Although the struggling Arizonan middle-class may view immigrants as an economic threat and welcome their departure, a shrinking population means a smaller economic pie for everyone in the state.

The passage of SB1070 and the frenzy over border security has exposed a fissure the size of the Grand Canyon in the state’s social fabric, dividing Anglos and Latinos into opposite and fearful camps. Since laws are normative, SB1070 sanctions and encourages inhospitable and even vigilante behavior, leading to ugly instances of racial discrimination and mistreatment. The children of immigrants, many of them American citizens by birth, are now the targets of laws which would ruthlessly deprive them of education and opportunity, of parents, and of citizenship. We have become like the Egyptians in the time of the Pharaohs: out of fear of scarcity we hoard what we have, view immigrants as a threat to prosperity, and attack their children.

Yet the nation needs immigrants. The demographic shift now underway ties our nation’s future prosperity to immigration. Our native-born workforce is declining precisely as our baby boom generation is poised to retire. Home to a large population of retirees, Arizona is in the forefront

of this huge demographic shift. By the year 2030, 25% of all Arizonans will be over 65 years of age. At that point, there will be only two workers in the active workforce to support the Social Security costs of each retiree. More immigrant workers, not fewer, will be needed just to replace the jobs vacated by retirees and to buy their homes as they move into retirement locations. Many of those future workers should be the current U.S.-born children of immigrants. Yet Arizona is now planning to systematically attack these children. Instead of viewing the children of immigrants as a threat, Arizonans should be seeing how their interests converge with those of immigrants.

We have forgotten what our faith traditions teach us: to welcome the stranger is to welcome a child of God. And America's history demonstrates that when we are generous, we are blessed among nations. The United States is a country of immigrants. Our nation was founded on a Covenantal understanding of community: in the Constitution, we agreed to unite together, as immigrants from many nations, under one flag, one God, for the common good of all. Although America has prospered from the labor and creativity of immigrants, in recent decades we have forgotten our roots and failed to welcome the strangers among us through a fair, humane, and practical approach to immigration reform.

The congregations of the Arizona Interfaith Network (AIN) have a long standing commitment to a fair, comprehensive, and practical solution to the immigration situation that will meet the genuine needs of Arizonans and the entire nation. Immigration reform must address legitimate border security issues and employer compliance. But enforcement alone has been the American policy for decades, and it exacerbates our broken system. Processing the backlog of applicants waiting for unification with legal resident family members will ensure fairness to those waiting in line. Creating a legal avenue for temporary workers will provide American business with workers when there is demand that the American supply of workers can't meet. Protecting the wages and working conditions of those workers will raise the floor for all workers in America by ensuring that business compete on a level playing field. And creating a pathway to permanent residency for 12 million migrants currently living in the shadows will allow America to count and integrate those residents who abide by our laws and are willing to make a contribution to this society. These are the long-term goals of fair and practical immigration reform. Yet in the short-term, we cannot afford to cast aside the most talented young people who have been educated in American schools and know no other country. The DREAM Act would ensure that America receives the benefit of their skills. And in the short-term, the AgJOBS Act would provide American farmers with the ready workforce they need to harvest crops in a timely way.

It is clear that the federal government and 111<sup>th</sup> U.S. Congress lack the bipartisan determination to pass comprehensive reform legislation. AIN congregations have the potential to create a constructive public dialogue that can guide the debate. They can effect reconciliation between the center right and the center left of the society, initiating a healthy process for thinking together about an immigration policy that works within our economy and culture.

During the past year, the Arizona Interfaith Network has sponsored six statewide gatherings of *Arizonans for Immigration Reform*, with over 300 clergy and laity from interfaith traditions working toward solutions for Arizona. From these convocations, AIN has adopted a three-fold strategy on immigration, for the benefit of Arizona's cultural, social, and economic future:

1) Welcome the Sojourner. Immigrants are members of our congregations and are treated with hospitality and dignity. Their family unity is to be respected and protected, and their children cherished. AIN congregations reach out to immigrants, giving them tools to protect the family's security and to integrate them into American life.

2) Engage our Congregations. Our communion as people of faith calls us to hear the fears and frustrations of all our brothers and sisters. AIN conducts Civic Academies where we explore with our God-given reason the history, economics and demographics around this issue, and engage in civil and loving dialogue with one another, looking at this issue through the lens of our faith traditions. These conversations are particularly important in electoral districts where elected officials need encouragement to move immigration reform forward.

3) Hold our Elected Officials Accountable. Arizonans elected members to Congress and to the Legislature to do the people's business on important issues. The mood of Arizonans is clear: polls indicate that we want border security AND a pathway to citizenship for those currently in the shadows. These desires are not contradictory: they are both necessary components of immigration reform, and lawmakers who implement one without the other fail to resolve this matter with justice. On May 13 of this year, an AIN delegation including Bishops and key clergy took this message to Washington, meeting with Senator McCain and the Departments of Justice and Homeland Security to oppose SB1070 and to lift up solutions to Arizona's crisis. AIN will continue to press elected officials to take up fair and practical measures such as the DREAM Act or AgJOBS in the short-term, while working toward a comprehensive solution.

Our interfaith community must build the capacity and shape the strategy to speak clearly and forcefully to both the hearts and minds of our state legislative leaders and citizens. We do not want to become complicit through inaction in a process designed to make global orphans out of a whole generation of U.S. children. For the collective prosperity and security of all Arizonans, who are the children of the immigrants and peoples of many cultures who founded our state; and for all our children who are the key to our future prosperity, AIN stands on these principles and commits to these strategies to unify what has been divided, to heal what has been broken. May we remember our traditions, reject the temptation to distract ourselves or to blame the vulnerable for serious issues that face Arizona, and join in this conversation.

## **DREAM Act (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act)**

This bipartisan legislation introduced on March 26, 2009 addresses the situation faced by young people who were brought to the United States years ago as undocumented immigrant children, and who have since grown up here but are being denied the ability to fully contribute to society. The DREAM Act would provide certain undocumented youth conditional legal status and eventual citizenship, if they attend college or join the military. It would also allow immigrant students access to higher education by returning to states the authority to determine who qualifies for in-state tuition.

### **Requirements:**

- **Age:** Immigrant students who must have entered the U.S. before age 16.
- **Academic:** The student must have been accepted for admission into a two-year or four-year institution of higher education or have earned a high school diploma or a GED certificate.
- **Long-term U.S. residence:** The student must reside in the U.S. when the law is enacted. In addition, those eligible must have lived in the U.S. for at least five years preceding the date of the enactment of the act.
- **Good moral character:** Immigrant students must demonstrate good moral character as defined in immigration law. In general, students must have no criminal background.

If the requirements are met, the student can apply for conditional status, which would last up to six years. Within six years, the student must: graduate from a 2-year institution of higher education, serve in the U.S. Military for at least 2 year, or complete at least 2 years toward a 4-year degree.

**What it means for students:** In 2006 the Arizona Interfaith Network organized against Proposition 300 (now a law that requires undocumented students to pay out of state tuition). AIN surfaced hundreds of stories from students who moved to the USA with their families while they were infants/children. Many of these students did not know they were undocumented until their teenage years. The DREAM Act could allow these students to come out of the shadows and fulfill their human potential.

**Economic Connection:** The DREAM Act could provide a way to increase the tax base for state, federal and local governments, According to the US Department of Commerce; a high school graduate earns \$1.2 million in the course of a 40-year span career compared to \$2.1 million for a person with a Bachelor's degree. A person holding a master's degree on average earns \$2.5 million in a 40-year period. Therefore a single person with a bachelor's degree who earns an average \$60,000 of taxable income will pay \$11,564 in taxes and welfare annually; in a 40-year span they will have contributed \$462,560.

**National Security Implication:** Allowing undocumented students a pathway to citizenship by joining the armed forces will support our national security efforts and lessen their pressure on recruitment.

## **AgJOBS: Food for Thought, Fuel for the Economy**

On May 14, 2009 U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) re-introduced legislation to address the nation's ongoing agriculture labor shortage. The Agricultural Job Opportunities, Benefits and Security Act (AgJOBS) would reform the broken H-2A seasonal worker program, provide farmers with the stable, legal workforce they need, and offer a pathway to citizenship for hard-working, law-abiding immigrants already employed on American farms.

AgJOBS is the result of over a decade of carefully negotiated agreements between business and labor and has two key components:

1. It makes long-term agricultural workers eligible to apply for temporary legal status (a "blue card") and then if certain very specific additional factors are met, such as continuing employment in agriculture, eligible for permanent resident status (a "green card").
2. It reforms the H-2A temporary foreign agricultural worker program by streamlining the hiring process, improving housing benefits, and providing better legal protections.

Our nation's agricultural "ecosystem" is part of a complex network, both domestically and internationally, that is interconnected with virtually every aspect of our economy, from actual production and delivery to commodities trading and global market competition. The economic impacts affect farm equipment manufacturing, packaging, processing, transportation, marketing, lending, and insurance. For example:

- The U.S. has approximately 20% of the international market share for agricultural goods.
- For every 1 agricultural worker job, up to 3 additional jobs are created for U.S. citizens.
- Eliminating immigrant workers from the dairy industry alone would reduce U.S. milk production by 29.5 billion pounds and the number of U.S. farms by 4,532. Retail milk prices would increase by an estimated 61%.
- Approximately 80% of Florida's 150,000 agricultural workers are undocumented immigrants. Their work provides up to 90% of the fresh domestic tomatoes that Americans eat between the months of December and May and are part of a \$1.6 billion a year business.

The AgJOBS Act would prioritize the verification of the workers enrolled through the blue card or the H-2A, both to ensure orderly compliance with the immigration process as preferable to the undocumented status and to protect workers from unscrupulous employers. Blue cards would have encrypted, biometric identifiers and contain other anti-counterfeiting protection.

A well-functioning and competitive agriculture industry is critical to ensuring economic viability for the U.S. and all its workers. Our agricultural industry needs a stable and legal workforce to continue to provide the food that every American family relies upon. Undocumented agricultural workers need the ability to come out of the shadows and not live in fear of unfair labor practices. AgJOBS is a win-win piece of legislation benefiting workers, employers, and the economy at large.