

## **Summary of Table Discussions at LWV-CC Community Dialogue [Jan. 19, 2008]**

### **I. Overview**

1. Is immigration an important topic to you in relation to the upcoming election? If so, what aspects of the comprehensive immigration issue concern you most?

Generally, all the tables agreed that immigration was important. Various comments about the comprehensive immigration issue included that there should be some consistency between enforcement at the northern and southern borders and among all ethnic groups; private property rights versus eminent domain was a difficult issue; a very serious economic issue; and issue linked to Department of Homeland Security [DHS]. Additional comments touched upon historical patterns repeating themselves; politicians criminalize or demonize Hispanics and increase fears; increases profiling; and need for a national ID card.

2. U.S. immigration policy quotas focus on four factors: employer need and employment-based preferences, family reunification, human rights issues, and diversity of country of origin. How important or unimportant do you believe these factors should be in relation to immigration quotas?

Generally, the discussion participants agreed that all four of the factors were important. A wide range of issues were mentioned, including that when labor is needed, workers let in, when don't need anymore, told to get out; issue driven by employment needs; dislike of quotas as well as should have diversity of origin; need more Border Patrol and need to follow laws although visas difficult to obtain; we are not doing immigration right with regard to human rights issues; the attraction of the U.S. is great; and college recruiting tends to be more pro-Asian and harder for Hispanics.

3. In your professional or personal life, have you had the opportunity to meet or get to know immigrants from any country?

Everyone noted that they had met many immigrants in the course of their lives, family, and/or employment. Various comments included statements that immigrants shouldn't be political issues; many students fear their families will be deported; and that many long-time immigrants just haven't felt the need to become citizens.

### **II. Global Interdependence and Migration**

1. The presentation you just heard mentions remittances, U.S. policy, and employment issues as key aspects of the immigration/migration issue. What do you believe are the most important aspects of global interdependence and migration?

Comments on this question were far-ranging, with little overlap among the tables. Comments included observation that we are all interconnected; the country is composed of immigrants; need for global perspective—what is success here might be disaster there; remittances mentioned and observation that the U.S. economy supports many around the

world. Negative issues mentioned were arrival of MS13 gang members and the issue of drug money. Regarding the workforce, comments included mobility of workforce; importance of living wage; and immigrants often earn low wages and are brought in as needed. Concern was also expressed that U.S. culture could suffer if flooded with too many immigrants [like the fall of Rome]; wide gap of wealthy versus poor; immigrants are not paying taxes; take advantage of system. Another person noted that what immigrants are not paying in taxes, they pay in various fees.

2. The National League study notes that immigrants are generally young and mobile, go where there is work, and create a just-in-time delivery of workers to places where they are needed most. What do you believe about these statements?

There was general agreement that the immigrant workforce was young and mobile. Other comments included that, as a group, immigrants help each other advance; immigrants educated here often don't want to go home; remittances are important to those back home; as more immigrants attend our colleges, they are marrying U.S. citizens; and caring for elderly immigrants already here is an issue.

3. The study also notes that pressures to emigrate from developing countries will remain intense, fueled by poverty, lack of jobs, population growth, and political instability. At the same time, globalization will increase access to information about lifestyles and opportunities in industrialized countries. What are your views about these statements?

The discussion participants generally agreed with these statements. One person observed that there are whole towns in Mexico where all the men are gone. The global media conveys the grass is greener message and people leave their homes to better themselves. The remaining comments were far-ranging, and included that immigration would promote multi-lingualism and awareness of other cultures; partnership, not dominance, is important; the U.S. discriminates against Mexican immigrants versus Asian immigrants; and 9/11 has become an excuse for discriminating against others living in the U.S. One participant also noted that the U.S. had more dominance years ago, but now the trade deficit is an issue and that perhaps it wasn't good that the U.S. had dominance.

### **III. Immigration: Impact on U.S. Economy**

1. Are immigrants a necessary part of the U.S. labor force? Can you elaborate on what factors support your view?

The participants generally agreed that immigrants are a necessary part of the workforce. Participants added comments including some types of immigrants are not desirable [e.g., MS13 gang members]; believe Americans would also work; there needs to be some limit and currently there is no control; and some prefer bring in to work and then go home capability. Negative comments included that immigrants believe they have all the rights as citizens and some refuse to learn English. Comments about human rights, no to the fence, and amnesty issues were also made.

2. The National study notes that immigrants have had a profound impact on company creation, economic innovation, and market value in the U.S. At the same time, the study notes that the negative effect of authorized and unauthorized immigrants on public-sector budgets is small, although the costs and benefits are not evenly allocated locally. What are your views on these statements?

The comments about this question were really varied. Some considered the statements an exaggeration; others noted that the education and welfare sectors were effected; the information in this brief was complex; border areas hard hit; education important—teach English; U.S. does a bad job of allocating locally; coming to hospital emergency rooms is a problem; and human rights issues for children born in the U.S. A couple of people noted that they don't like things in both Spanish and English; that immigrants should be put in U.S. schools; don't like voice mails with Spanish language options; and that we need caps and better control.

3. The study notes that the U.S. currently issues 5,000 visas per year to year-round unskilled workers, while 400,000 to 500,000 additional such workers are needed to keep the economy moving. What are your views on these statements?

Comments varied, although many mentioned, in some form, that we needed a functional visa program. The comments included an example of one company that uses seasonal visas successfully; need to increase visa, but keep track of the people; visa system too strict post 9/11; the 400,000 to 500,000 number seems high; illegals do dirty jobs; no system is set up to process contractors who then pay workers low wages; bracero program over now; families of immigrants suffering. Several comments concerned the political aspects of the issue, including that Congress is weak; applications for visas "lost"; immigrants not politically correct; politicians escalate fears; the laws are impossible; not against illegals—just want them to be legal, know English, and not change our culture to accommodate them. Participants also noted that we are a country of immigrants; because of boomers, we need the workforce; this is a moral, not a political, issue; living wage is important; we need to look at needed workers; and schools are overloaded trying to teach illegals and also teach to tests.

#### **IV. Border Enforcement**

1. What do you believe are the responsibilities and/or challenges that employers face regarding hiring immigrant employees?

The comments varied and included that there was not much pressure on employers to follow laws; we need to get enforceable laws and then enforce them—including penalties; need to check papers; currently responsible for verifying documents—but not too much; need better documentation guidelines; national ID cards versus invasion of privacy; important to observe workers rights and to follow the law; laws need simplification and clarity; laws say don't hire, but we need the workers; the government has to decide what to do; impossible to check outdated visas; and disincentive to use the current on-line checking system.

2. What do you believe are the possible benefits and costs [both monetary and non-monetary] associated with the border fence?

The comments regarding the fence were generally negative, including damming the river is impossible; resistance to the fence and eminent domain such as in Eagle Pass; fence won't help overall; negative psychological impact; ecological problems caused by fence; why no Canadian border fence; see no benefit to "the wall"; will stop nothing; can't build high enough, deep enough to keep people out; high cost; and no benefit except to fence builder. Other comments included the need exit monitoring for all; fence construction provides a little employment and might keep drugs out; and we need cheap labor, but is a problem when they don't leave after end of seasonal labor. Additional costs noted waste of money; foolish; loss of landowner rights; illegals stay longer and don't go home; loss of respect between nations; and ecosystem impacts serious.

3. A significant proportion of the unauthorized population enters the country legally, but then they overstay their visas and become illegal. However, DHS officials concede that they lack the funding and technology to meet their deadline to have exit-monitoring systems at the 50 busiest crossings by December 2007. This means officials will continue to be unable to track visas. How important or unimportant do you believe it is to have an exit-monitoring system at busy border crossings?

Generally participants agreed that we need a tracking system and even included the suggestion that the fence money should be used for this instead. Comments included that there is no monitoring; wall may be temporarily necessary; realistically, what can be done; perhaps a virtual wall would be better; need more information; France has an exit monitoring system; need entrance and exit monitoring; exit monitoring unenforceable and unfair; Congress doesn't do what it should; and no confidence in Congress. Types of ID suggestions included mini-passport and implanting microchip.

## **V. Family Reunification and Diversity Policies**

1. Do you agree or disagree that diversity is an important component of U.S. immigration policy? Can you elaborate on what factors support your view?

Participants generally agreed that diversity was important, although a few disagreed. Comments included that diversity was needed, but the size of the group can cause a problem if it is too large [the example of Vietnamese fishermen in TX was cited]; sad when families torn apart and being split up can cause problems; how to define diversity is key; need to develop better criteria; now we tend to take cream of the crop; we were all immigrants from the pilgrims on; diversity is important and gives the U.S. spice; great to have all types of Hispanics—Mexicans, Salvadorans, Spanish, Cuban, etc; all contribute much to society.

2. Do you agree or disagree that family unity is an important component of U.S. immigration policy? Can you elaborate on what factors support your view?

Participants generally agreed that family unity was important. Comments included that unity was better for families; need to clarify what is immediate family/family unit; think family unit should be parents and biological or legally adopted children; and affects schools and employers. Other comments included concern about health issues; immigration issue is a problem with State department versus DHS; some differences exist with respect to color and country of origin about what groups get welcomed.

3. As you reflect on the information presented today, what aspect of immigration (legal or illegal) concerns you the most?

Cost as a driving force--resources used for immigrants that should be used for U.S. citizens, particularly in education.

Immigration needs to be reformed; should sanction employers; should stop using the issue politically; need to deal with this problem now; border has no natural sovereignty; currently there is no humanity in this area—instead there are hate crimes, discrimination, and it needs to be seriously reformed.

The undocumented are a real problem; what do we do with those here now; and there are differences regarding race in how different groups are welcomed.