IMMIGRATION LEGISLATION

Millions of immigrants, mostly men, have come to the USA without the required immigration documents in order to work. They usually take low-level jobs in our country – jobs that others avoid, and they send portions of their earnings to their families to minimize home-country poverty and begin building a better life for family members. Should we thank and honor these immigrants for doing our hard work and helping their families? Or should we toss them out? Such a decision is about to be made in our congress.

**HOUSE:** The House of Representatives has approved an immigration bill that is extremely harsh. It would criminalize all undocumented immigrants as well as those who help them. Here are some more specifics:

- Mandatory detention for all non-Mexican illegal immigrants arrested at ports of entry or at the borders.
- Illegal presence in the country becomes a felony.
- A drunk-while-driving conviction becomes a deportable offense.
- Building two-layer fences along 700 miles of the 2,000-mile Mexico-USA border.

**SENATE:** The Judiciary Committee has passed and sent to the full Senate a more moderate bill. Here are some of its specifics:

- Permits undocumented immigrants who were in the United States before 2004 to continue to work legally for six years if they pay a $1,000 fine and clear a criminal background check. They then become eligible for permanent residence upon paying another $1,000 fine, any back taxes and having learned English.
- New immigrants would have to obtain temporary work visas, and would also be able to earn legal permanent residence after six years.
- Creates a guest worker program for about 1.5 million immigrant farm workers, who can also earn legal permanent residency.
- Allows illegal immigrant students with high school diplomas or the GED, no criminal record and meet other criteria to enroll in college or university (paying in state tuition if the state so decides) or enlist in the military.

Republican Senate leader Frist plans to introduce a much harsher bill that will include punitive dollar penalties for hiring someone without documents.
**IMMIGRATION ACTION**

Throughout the USA (and in some foreign countries), there has been a dramatic outpouring of support for a bill that does not, in essence, call for criminalizing undocumented immigrants and their friends, and does not prevent immigrants without papers from eventually obtaining permanent residence and then citizenship.

In Los Angeles, for instance, an estimated 500,000 people participated in a march for immigrant rights. In our Washington area, there have been several large gatherings calling for respect of the hard-working good neighbors who are now threatened.

Now is a crucial time. The Senate must decide whether to support the Judiciary Committee’s draft legislation. The needed support may not be there. Even if a moderate bill is passed by the Senate, a conference committee must work out the differences between the House and Senate bills. The odds may be against moderation. Alternatively, the conference participants might deadlock, leaving the situation as it is today with formal illegality and informal tolerance by some yet attacks by others such as the members of the so-called Minutemen group.

It is very important to write and telephone our Senators, the Republican and Democratic leaders in the Senate, a Congressman, and the House leadership. The needed information is below:

- Senator Mikulski (Maryland): (202) 224-4654, mikulski.senate.gov/mailform.html
- Senator Sarbanes (Maryland): (202) 224-4524, sarbanes.senate.gov/pages/email.html
- Senate Democratic Leader Reid: (202) 224-3542, reid.senate.gov/email_form.cfm
- Congressman Van Hollen: (301) 927-5223, http://www.house.gov/vanhollen/contact.htm

**OTHER NEWS**

**LANGLEY PARK DAY 2006:** Planning for this annual event is moving forward at a fast pace. Medical professionals, dancers, musicians, lawyers, college representatives, vendors, face painters, and others will be participating to make sure that everyone who participates will be healthy, well-fed, happy, and more. Be sure to pass the word that Sunday, May 7th is the day, the time is from noon until 4:30 p.m., and the central place is the Langley Park Community Center at 1500 Merrimac Drive in Langley Park.

**ACTION LANGLEY PARK:** ALP’s next monthly meeting will be on Thursday, April 20th from 7 p.m. until 8:40 p.m. The place is the Langley Park Community Center. Everyone is welcome! One of the agenda items will be the final planning of Langley Park Day, including how best to publicize the event.

**NEW SCHOOL CHIEF:** The new chief executive of Prince George’s County’s public schools is Mr. John E. Deasy, who will begin work here on May 1st. Let’s hope that this time the school board has found a person who can instigate significant positive changes in the system so that truancy, dropping out, poor test scores, and other challenges can be met. For Deasy’s remuneration, which may exceed $300k per year, we should be optimistic!

**PUBLIC TOILETS?** Planning for the Langley Park Transit Center at New Hampshire Avenue and University Boulevard is steadily moving forward, and site clearing (the site is now occupied by a Taco Bell franchise) might take place towards the end of 2006. There are already fairly detailed plans for the facility. But there is one difference of opinion: whether public toilets should be included. The argument against the toilets is the cost of maintenance (who will check on the toilet paper, etc.?), although some small assessment on area businesses would address that problem. The argument for the toilets is, as a wise person once said: “If you gotta go, you gotta go!”

**LONG BRANCH MEDICAL BUILDING:** Washington Adventist Hospital, a critical element in the health of many residents of Langley Park and its surrounding neighborhoods, is scheduled to relocate in a few years. This might have a negative impact on health in Langley Park. However, Adventist Health is planning to open a clinic in Long Branch (near Flower Avenue and Piney Branch Road); it should be able to absorb some of the demand for health services. The Gazette reports: “The nearby 56,000-square-foot building … will include doctors’ offices, an outpatient surgery center, a diagnostic imaging center, a primary-specialty care clinic and 190 parking spaces, most of them located below ground.”

This “Extra” edition of Barrio de Langley Park is being issued to address the potential crisis facing millions of immigrants in the USA. Comments may be sent to actionlangleypark@yahoo.com.