

Speaking up for immigrants, refugees

Protesters call for state action at Capitol steps

NATALIE PATE
STATESMAN JOURNAL

Hundreds of people gathered on the Capitol steps Feb. 1 urging the Oregon State Legislature to take action to protect and defend immigrants and refugees.

President Trump suspended the U.S. refugee program for 120 days, banned all immigrants from seven Muslim-majority countries — Syria, Iraq, Iran, Somalia, Sudan, Yemen, and Libya — for 90 days, and ordered his administration to develop “extreme vetting” measures for immigrants from those countries to keep “radical Islamic terrorists” out of the United States.

“We want actions ... That’s why we are here today,” said Francisco Lopez, political director for Voz Hispana, the immigrant rights organization responsible for organizing the rally.

It wants the legislature to agree to spend up to \$20 million to pay for lawyers who would help people facing deportation; the state to sue to stop the president’s executive order on refugees and immigration; sue to stop the feds from defunding sanctuary cities; expand state laws prohibiting local law enforcement from aiding deportation efforts; prohibit state law enforcement databases from being used in immigration investigations; and assure that victims of racism and discrimination still have full access to state services.

The rally coincided with the first day of the Legislative session.

“What makes America great is its diversity,” said Jorge Rodriguez via Lopez translating. “Brothers and sisters, we are not criminals; we are hard working people. We want all cities to be sanctuaries.”

Protesters held signs Wednesday with messages in support of those already in Oregon and against the Trump administration’s actions, including “Together, we rise,” “Oregon will not become a cog in the Trump machine,” “Love trumps fear, refugees are welcome here,” and “Super callous frail racist sexist nazi POTUS.”



ANNA REED/STATESMAN JOURNAL

Asli Ali, 39, of Woodburn, left, and Dana Bliss, 56, of Salem, attend an immigrant and refugee rights rally in response to President Trump’s ban on people entering the United States from seven Muslim-majority countries at the Oregon State Capitol in Salem on Feb. 1. Ali is an Arabic and Somali interpreter for local school districts and both women work to help resettle refugees in the Willamette Valley.

The crowd listened to speakers from a handful of groups for an hour in the nearly 40-degree weather before entering the Capitol to deliver the list of demands to representatives and senators.

At one point, protesters held hands and cheered, “Sí, se puede,” Spanish for “Yes, it is possible” or “Yes, we can.”

Speakers did not mention a specific bill currently facing the legislature they support.

Gregory McKelvey, 23, is a law student and leader for the Portland Resistance, an activist group.

He said some people were not able to attend the rally, but he encouraged those who did to network and establish a community for future action.

He also spoke to the fear of many peo-

ple they will be deported, even if they are here legally.

“This is not normal,” he said. “This is not OK.”

According to the Oregon Department of Human Services, more than 64,000 refugees have resettled in Oregon since 1975. Most of these refugees initially settle in the greater Portland metro area.

Currently, the most common refugee groups arriving in Oregon are from Cuba, Burma, Bhutan, Iran, Iraq, and Somalia.

As for immigrants, Oregon is home to more than 391,000 immigrants, making about 10 percent of all Oregonians “foreign-born.”

More than 11 million immigrants are estimated to be living in the United

States illegally, according to the PEW Research Center and Migration Policy Institute.

By comparison, in 2014, around 47 percent, or 20 million, of all U.S. immigrants were naturalized U.S. citizens. The remaining 53 percent, or 22.4 million, included lawful permanent residents, unauthorized immigrants, and legal residents on temporary visas, such as students and temporary workers.

For more information, contact Voz Hispana by calling 503-884-2679, emailing vozhispana.woregon@gmail.com.

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Hiring freeze: Seasonal firefighters, park rangers exempt

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Thousands of seasonal jobs in the Northwest could be safe after all, following a clarification of President Donald Trump’s 90-day hiring freeze of civilian federal workers.

Park rangers and firefighters hired each summer to serve the nation’s public lands appear to be exempt from the freeze, according to a memo issued Jan. 31 by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget.

A list of exemptions to the hiring freeze included “seasonal employees and short-term temporary employees necessary to meet traditionally recurring sea-

sonal workloads,” the statement said.

A second exemption said the head of any agency can exempt any position deemed necessary to “meet public safety responsibilities, including essential activities to the extent that they protect life and property.”

Officials at the U.S. Forest Service and interagency departments that hire wildland firefighters couldn’t immediately comment on the clarification.

The two exemptions appear to apply to the thousands of people hired each summer in the Northwest by agencies such as the Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management and National Park Service.

Last week, five Oregon lawmakers wrote a letter to the White House ex-

pressing concern that enough seasonal workers would be hired in time to fight forest fires.

“Without staff in place to prepare for the wildfire season, which is starting earlier and earlier every year due to climate change and years of severe drought conditions across the country, our forests and communities are put in harm’s way,” lawmakers said in a letter to the president. “Seasonal hiring will be starting soon and uncertainty about how to proceed could have serious impacts on public safety.”

The Forest Service hired about 11,000 seasonal employees in 2015—about 6,200 of whom were firefighting-related. Department of Interior hires “thousands”

more for firefighting-related jobs, but an exact number wasn’t immediately available, National Interagency Fire Center said.

In the Pacific Northwest, the Forest Service and National Park Service previously announced plans to hire 1,250 people this summer for recreation, visitor services, and engineering.

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