

Why I support immigration reform

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AFL-CIO President

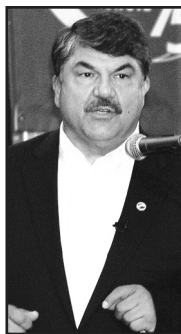
This is a good moment to explain why I feel so passionately about enacting immigration reform that provides a real pathway to citizenship for 11 million immigrants who call this country home.

You may know that until about a dozen years ago, the AFL-CIO did not support policies that give immigrants a route to citizenship; most unions saw those policies as a way for employers to find low-cost workers and push down wages. Our official policy changed in 2000, when we asserted that the AFL-CIO “proudly stands on the side of immigrant workers.”

Even today, I get mail and other comments criticizing me and the AFL-CIO for supporting reform, claiming that bringing immigrants out of the shadows will worsen the continuing jobs crisis. I know that good jobs are scarce and family pocketbooks are squeezed. Anxiety is natural. But I also believe those comments are misguided.

A century ago, America’s established unions, to a large extent, turned their backs on new immigrants as members, and were not welcoming to women, people of color, and millions of so-called unskilled industrial workers.

That has never sat well with me. When people use the word “immigrant”



like an epithet, I take it personally. I come from a small town in southwestern Pennsylvania’s coal country called Nemaquin. It was not easy when my family came to this country. My parents and grandparents fled poverty and war from different corners of Europe.

When I was a kid, there was an ugly

name for every one of us in all 12 languages spoken in Nemaquin — wop and Hunkey and Polack and kike. We were the last hired and first fired, the people who did the hardest and most dangerous work, the people whose pay got shorted because we didn’t know the language and were afraid to complain.

When the immigrants of my parents’ and grandparents’ generation got to the mines and mills, the people already there said we were taking their jobs and ruining their country. Yet in the end, the immigrants of my parents’ and grandparents’ generation prevailed, and built

America. This is the history of my family, and this is the story of towns large and small across America, places like Seattle and St. Louis, San Antonio and Chicago and so many others.

And yet it doesn’t take long for us to forget the past and focus on anyone we think is different, and to bring back those familiar responses — that immigrants are taking our jobs, ruining our country.

When I hear that kind of talk, I ask: Did an immigrant move your plant overseas? Did an immigrant take away your pension? Or cut your health care? Did an immigrant undermine America’s workers’ right to organize? Or crash the financial system? Did immigrant workers write the trade laws that have sent

millions of jobs from our shores? Of course not.

In fact, as more immigrants gain the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, our chances of a future of shared prosperity increase. America’s economic strategy must bring us together, not drive us apart.

The reform President Obama proposed is a big step in the right direction, and it has the potential to lead us all in a better direction.

As president of the AFL-CIO, I’m proud to say that we open our arms to everybody who works — no matter where you’re from — and we demand commonsense policies that reflect

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year member of the union.

As was reported in the Feb. 15 edition of the Labor Press, employers agreed to merge the Portland area medical plan with the Joint Labor Management Retail Trust. JLMRT covers employees from Salem to the California border, in Central Oregon, in far Eastern Oregon, and in Southwest Washington.

Employers will increase funding for medical insurance by 14.87 percent; JLMRT members will see their Level 3 benefits improve, with deductibles reduced from \$500 to \$300 and annual out-of-pocket costs reduced from \$5,000 to \$3,000. After annual deductibles are met, the plan will pay 85 percent of the bill, a 10 percent increase from the previous contract.

Contract expiration dates also were altered so that Portland will lead off in the next round of bargaining starting in June 2015. The union wanted its largest group to be first out of the blocks because it provides more power at the bargaining table. In the past, the Portland unit bargained toward the end, after smaller contracts downstate had been completed. Additionally, the time span between when the first and last contracts expire was narrowed from 30 months to 16 months.

On the downside, workers will get a raise of 25 cents an hour over three years; it will take new hires more hours to reach journey-level status; and they won’t be paid time-and-a-half when working holidays.

Anderson said it was probably the best the bargaining committee was going to get, short of a strike.

Here is a list of the ratified contracts and their expiration dates:

Portland area, June 2015; Bend, July 2015; Newberg, September 2015; Vancouver area, December 2015; Burns, December 2015; Klamath Falls, December 2015 (includes Sherms; Longview/Cowlitz County, January 2016; Roseburg, January 2016 (includes Sherms); Medford, January 2016; Grants Pass, January 2016; Eugene, February 2016; Brookings, February 2016 (includes McKay’s Meat); The Dalles/Hood River, June 2016; McMinnville Meat, August 2016; Lincoln City/Newport, August 2016; Salem and Albany, August, 2016; Florence, October 2016; North Bend/Coos Bay, October 2016; and Tillamook/Astoria, November, 2016,

When she has to work sick, you may get more than your coffee.

Not everyone gets the time they need to recover from an illness or care for sick family members – and it affects all of us. 40% of private-sector workers and 80% of low-income workers have no paid sick days from their jobs.

Ask Portland City Council to ensure that all workers can earn paid sick time. It’s good for all of us.

Learn more at www.everybodybenefitspdx.org

Everybody
Benefits

Portland’s Campaign for
Earned Sick Days

