

Should Portland become a sanctuary city?

BY M. NELS JOHNSON

CONTRIBUTING WRITER



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I met Manuel a couple of months ago. He's of average height and weight. His handshake is firm and callused from years of construction work. One of the first things you notice about Manuel is the determined and proud look in his eye. Manuel went on to tell me that he started with nothing, working day and night to make ends meet for him and his family. Gradually, he got better jobs, was able to buy a house, even put a little away for the future. He wanted his children to have a better life than he had. He's not rich, not even close; but he's earned enough to pay his bills.

As we talked his eyes lit up with the pride of a proud parent, as he told me that he was sending his two daughters to college. See, Manuel never graduated from high school, certainly never received any college education. But he believed that sending his kids to college was one of the most important things a parent could ever do for their children. He said the sacrifices he made to get his girls to college were worth it, and he'd do it again.

By all accounts, Manuel has lived a life akin to the American Dream. He's not rich, but he's got enough, consistently improving his standing in life and taking care of his family. But there's just one problem: Manuel is undocumented.

Manuel works hard, pays taxes, takes care of his family has never been in trouble with the law and volunteers in his community. Every day when he leaves the house, he wonders, "Will today finally be the day when immigration catches up with me? Is today the day when I'll be detained and deported?"

It's no secret that we need immigration reform, but Washington D.C. lacks the appetite to get the job done. President Obama has earned the unenviable distinction of deporting far more undocumented immigrants than President George W. Bush ever did. The Senate passed a bipartisan immigration overhaul plan that was deeply flawed, but at least provided a (albeit convoluted and needlessly complicated) pathway to citizenship. The bill is languishing the House of Representatives with no signs of life. Speaker Boehner originally said he would consider a piecemeal approach to immigration reform but has since declared the issue dead, claiming that President Obama can't be trusted to enforce the laws already in existence. Washington's inability to pass comprehensive immigration reform is just one more example of how broken and dysfunctional it is. It's time we looked elsewhere for solutions.

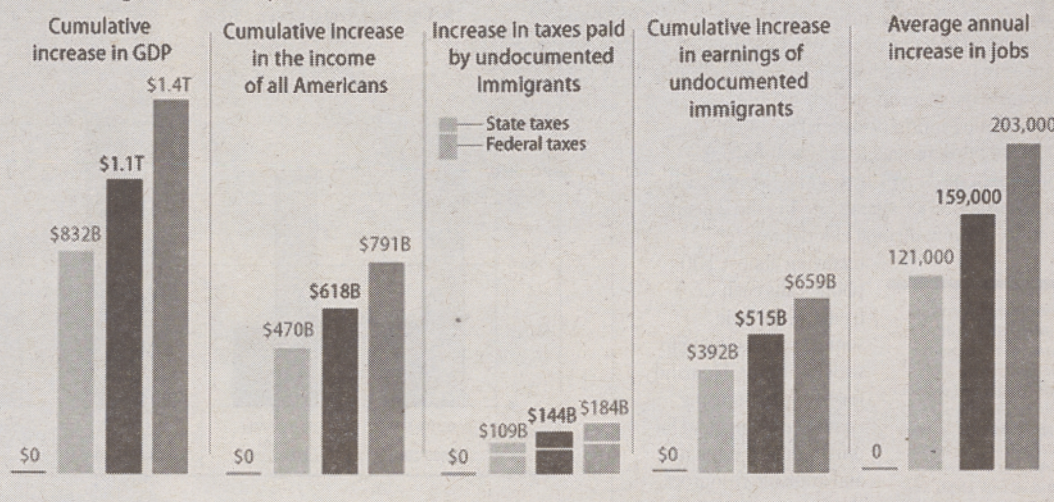
Here in Portland it seems like we have few options. What can we do? Well, it turns out that there is plenty that we can do. Immigration laws are federal laws, and as such, are largely enforced by the federal government. In *Printz v. United States*, the Supreme Court held that parts of the Brady Act (a bill aimed at reducing gun violence) were unconstitutional under the 10th Amendment. Essentially, the Court said that the federal government couldn't make state and local governments enforce federal laws. This applies to federal immigration laws as well, and as such, the federal government

FIGURE 1

The nature and timing of immigration reform matters

- No reform: \$0 for all scenarios
- If undocumented immigrants acquire legal status in 2013 but no citizenship within 10 years
- If undocumented immigrants acquire legal status in 2013 and citizenship in five years
- If undocumented immigrants acquire legal status and citizenship in 2013

Economic gains over 10 years:



GRAPHIC COURTESY OF THE CENTER FOR AMERICAN PROGRESS

can't make Portland enforce them either.

Portland prides itself on being a city that is both progressive and inclusive; we value people and relationships over material or corporate wealth. We believe that people should have the freedom to live as they choose. We are also a city that encourages people to be the best they can be. We can and must do better with immigration issues. It's time for the City of Portland to say that Portland Police will no longer inquire about a person's legal status, no longer detain a person because of their lack of status and no longer turn that person over to federal immigration authorities.

The time is now for Portland to embrace undocumented immigrants and become a sanctuary city. According to the Pew Research Center, there are approximately 160,000 undocumented immigrants in Oregon, with many of those located in Portland. Most are like Manuel and his family; hard working, wanting nothing more than to provide a better life for their children. Portland should be a place where undocumented immigrants can come out of the shadows, live normal lives, start businesses, play active roles in the community. None of this will happen as long as the shadow of deportation hangs over their heads.

Beyond the moral argument for Portland embracing undocumented immigrants lays an economic one. Research by economists on the economic benefit of bringing undocumented immigrants out of the shadows and into mainstream society shows an overwhelmingly positive economic impact on cities, states and the nation as a whole. In a white paper published by the Center for American Progress entitled "The Economic Effects of Granting Legal Status and Citizenship to Undocumented Immigrants," Robert Lynch and Patrick Oakford argue bringing undocumented immigrants into the light will add billions of dollars to the national economy on the low end and trillions of

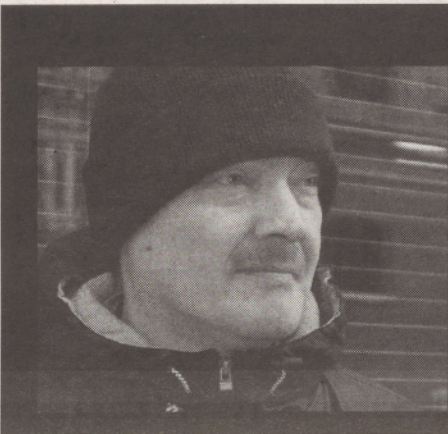
dollars on the high end. Imagine the economic growth potential for Portland if we took the bold step and allowed all undocumented immigrants in our midst to come out of the shadows.

Responsible budgeting is another reason Portland ought to change its policies and embrace undocumented immigrants. At the state and local levels of government we are in a prolonged era of slashing services to balance budgets. Even with the increase in tax revenue in 2013 and 2014, governments are still adding back services they slashed during the Great Recession. Local governments are continuing to do more with less and therefore scrutinize the use of every single dollar to ensure maximum efficiency. Immigration is a federal issue, so rather than allowing the burden of immigration enforcement to fall on the backs of state and local government budgets, let the federal government spend the money to enforce their own laws.

It's important to remember why Manuel, and others like him came to this country. In Manuel's home state of Chiapas, there were no jobs and increased drug violence. He knew that if he stayed there, it would be extremely difficult to do even basic things like providing food for his family. So he made the treacherous trip across the border, found a job and worked hard. He managed to save enough to put his kids through college, and all the while living the American dream of a better life. His life's work and dream could be shattered in an instant if he gets deported back to a country he hasn't seen in over 25 years.

We can do better than this; we must do better than this. As Congress dithers while Rome burns, it's time Portland was a leader in immigration reform.

Author's Note: Manuel's name has been changed to protect his identity.



*This man works.
So does Street Roots.*

Using What I Can

by Tony Boone

When I was 19, I was imprisoned in a cell that looked straight out of Alcatraz. I had 3 months to discharge. My neighbor to the right was fresh on a 12 year bit, a guy to my left doing triple life. Stuck in the middle of that I was always close to shitting my pants. I received no mail. I got out of my cell 2 hours a day and I was losing it. One day I was getting completely annoyed by a couple of guys on the cell block yelling "rook to king 4." I later learned they were playing chess and I wanted to learn. Chess sets were \$10. I was making 8 cents an hour to sit on my ass. At 64 cents a day \$10 is a ransom so I MacGyvered up a set out of toilet paper and, true to their nature, a guard found me using my ghetto Charmin chess set and flushed it. Don't go to prison, kids.