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agricultural industries being “taken advantage of by other people just because of their status,” citing lower pay and higher demands put on undocumented immigrants in comparison to their legal counterparts.

“So many immigrants, they’re scared because they’re not supposed to be here,” she said. “They don’t fight, they don’t speak up – they just take it.”

Before this election, Adriana wasn’t interested in politics. “But now,” she said, “I was just like, why not? I’m one of the few that can do it, and actually speak for the ones that can’t.”

She and her mother each paid the required \$680 fee to apply for citizenship.

They received free legal advice at Causa’s citizenship clinic before applying, which saved them from having to pay an additional \$500 to \$1,000 for an attorney to help them through the process. Adriana said one law firm quoted her \$2,000 for legal advice, the highest estimate.

“I think that if we would have had to hire a lawyer,” Adriana said, “we would not have been able to do it because it’s hard enough trying to save up for the fee when you have other bills, and in my mother’s case, kids to support.”

Causa’s Miller said, “One of the top barriers for people applying for U.S. citizenship is how costly it is.” That’s why her organization offers free citizenship clinics.

“You can actually look at USCIS application numbers and see a huge dip when the price goes up,” she said. “It’s one of the leading reasons why, although Mexican legal permanent residents are one of the most populous in the United States in terms of numbers, they are actually the least likely to apply for U.S. citizenship.”

She said the cost is “not only having an impact on low-income people; it’s also having a racial impact – or a country-of-origin impact – because Mexican immigrants, who tend to be low-wage workers as well, face increasing barriers to apply for U.S. citizenship.”

Portland immigration attorney Teresa Statler recommends that immigrants who have any history of arrest, at the very least, have a legal consultation before applying.

“Many people who file for naturalization aren’t aware that some things in their past can, instead of making them a citizen, actually place them into removal proceedings,” she said. In rare cases, the application process may reveal mistakes made when the individual applied for residency that can also lead to deportation, she said.

Statler has also noticed a significant increase in immigrants’ applying for citizenship in recent months.

“I’ve been doing this for about 23 years now,” she said, “and I’ve had people coming in the door in droves in the last couple of months wanting to become citizens – people that have lived here 40 years with a green card, even longer – because they are very upset and concerned about what’s going on in our country today, politically.”

She said business at her office had more than doubled, and people of many nationalities are seeking citizenship for the same reason.

“I have a gentleman from Australia who



Adriana Sanchez, of Keizer, and her mother, Silvia Sanchez, of Oregon City, have lived in the United States for nearly 20 years. They both became U.S. citizens in March and are looking forward to voting for president.

PHOTO BY JOE GLODE



Immigrants participate in a naturalization ceremony May 5 in Portland. Maria Salacr, left, of Guatemala, said earning the right to vote factored into her decision to obtain citizenship.

PHOTO BY DIEGO DIAZ

got his green card in 1970, so that’s 46 years he’s been a permanent resident, and he’s been very concerned about what’s going on in America, and he said, ‘It’s time for me to be an American. I need to vote,’” Statler said. “The Republicans have been brewing this for many years. They are the party of anti-immigrant rhetoric. There’s no question, and it’s not just Hispanic immigrants that are worried and offended; it’s many people.”

At Portland’s Cinco de Mayo Fiesta at Tom McCall Waterfront Park earlier this month, 48 immigrants from 20 countries

took part in a naturalization ceremony. The reasons participants gave for applying for citizenship varied, but some said it was largely due to the political climate.

“I don’t want to be separated from my family,” said José Sanchez of Clackamas County (no relation to Adriana and Silvia). He wore a pressed blue suit, red-striped tie and continuous grin to the ceremony.

“It’s time for people to wake up and do what they are supposed to do in this country,” he said. He’s lived in the U.S. for 20 years and said he’s going to vote in the presidential election because, “I want to

show people I am doing my part.”

Laurentino Martínez moved to the U.S. from Mexico 30 years ago, and when asked why he’s naturalizing now, he replied, “Because I want to vote.”

Also at the annual naturalization

ceremony, hosted by Portland Guadalajara Sister City Association and USCIS, was Maria Salacr. She emigrated from Guatemala 28 years ago, and through a translator she said earning the right to

“I’m one of the few that can do it, and actually speak for the ones that can’t.”

ADRIANA SANCHEZ, RECENTLY NATIONALIZED U.S. CITIZEN, ON VOTING

vote was a motivating factor in her decision as well.

For others, it wasn’t so much the right to vote as it was gaining a sense of security that drove them to apply, should the next president attempt to deport non-citizens.

Roberto Valla, originally from El Salvador, said he applied for citizenship “because I want to be sure of my safety. I see all the changes that are happening – I want to be safe to be here.” He also plans to vote, after having lived in the U.S. for 26 years.

There are several ways an undocumented immigrant can gain legal status as a permanent resident, including having a family member that’s in the U.S. legally. Typically, they are eligible to apply for citizenship after spending five years in the U.S. as a permanent resident.

Many gained their residency 30 years ago, when President Ronald Reagan signed the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, granting 2.7 million immigrants legal status.

“Many of the folks that received legal permanent residency in that time, they are just now coming to apply for U.S. citizenship,” Miller said.

When Adriana and her mother sat down with Street Roots in front of a coffee shop in Keizer on an overcast Saturday afternoon in late April, she explained that she knows many Latinos who are afraid of what could happen if Trump becomes president.

“People being so out and open about being aggressive about it,” she said, “and throwing so much hate towards immigrants, I think is sort of scary. If this is how it is now, I think it’s going to get worse when somebody gets picked. If it’s the person that I really don’t want to win, I think it will get a lot worse.”

Her mother, Silvia, thought answering questions in English would be the biggest challenge in becoming a citizen. Although applicants can take the test in their native language, depending on their age and how long they’ve lived in the U.S., Silvia did not qualify, but she answered all the questions correctly, she said, beaming.

She said she will use her vote to speak for immigrants who are abused and cannot vote themselves.

“My vote can bring the light of a thousand stars,” she said in Spanish, with smile from ear to ear.