

OPINION

NEWS ITEM:

LOCAL POLITICIANS BAN BURKINI ON FRANCE'S BEACHES



Honoring All Workers Regardless of Immigration

It's Time to fix a broken system

BY DEBORAH HALL



On Labor Day we honored the hardworking men and women who keep America running. But let's also remember the millions of aspiring Americans who are forced to work and live in the shadows due to our broken immigration system.

As a member of the American Federation of Teachers and the AFL-CIO, I urge our elected officials to come together on behalf of our nation and come up with a commonsense, compassionate, and comprehensive plan for immigration reform!

The time is now for a comprehensive immigration reform plan that provides a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants who are often forced to live in the shadows without basic rights and protections. We need a plan that ensures safe, secure jobs, protects labor rights for all workers, upholds family unifica-

tion and expands access to higher education.

I am urging members of Congress to create pathways to citizenship for the approximately 11 million undocumented immigrants and students living and working in the U.S. who deserve a reasonable road map to citizenship.

I currently live in Vancouver, and I know that my city, state, as well as my great country have been strengthened and enriched by the diversity immigrants bring. The failure to pass commonsense immigration reform is hurting our economy and communities around the country.

The reforms must ensure safe, secure jobs and protect labor rights that guarantee the uniform enforcement of worker protection standards, including real, enforceable remedies for labor and employment law violations for all workers—regardless of their immigration status. Abuses in the current visa program that undermine the focus on retraining and hiring American workers should be addressed before any expansion of existing guest worker programs is considered.

An immigration reform plan also should reduce incentives for employers to hire undocumented or temporary foreign workers. All workers, foreign-born and native, should be guaranteed full workplace rights, including the right to self-petition, mobility and the right to organize. Any comprehensive immigration reform legislation must incorporate a workable solution to address the future flow of immigrants that includes the needs of the American economy.

Family unification must be a priority. Families should be allowed to remain together. When parents are deported and separated from their children, our communities suffer. Undocumented immigrants have settled roots and are working and contributing members of their communities. They need a road map to earn legalization to come out of the shadows.

I also strongly support an immigration policy that allows U.S. citizens, visa-contingent workers and lawful permanent residents the ability to seek a visa on the basis of a permanent relationship with a same-sex partner. The plan must also increase access to high-

er education.

The DREAM Act is a critical part of immigration reform. About 65,000 undocumented students graduate from high school each year. Yet, without the DREAM Act, they are relegated to a life in the underground economy. Dream Act Students have done everything our society has asked them to do; yet, they are still being punished.

The DREAM Act is good for our students, and it's good for our economy. For our DREAMers who already have gone through the process and received temporary relief through the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, there should be a streamlined process towards citizenship.

Let this year be the year that we stand in solidarity with immigrant workers and communities by urging Congress to finally pass comprehensive immigration reform with a path to citizenship and real job protections!

Deborah Hall is a longtime leader at Portland Community College where she has worked and represented classified employees. She resides in Vancouver.



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