

U.S. on Verge of Most Sweeping Immigration Reform in 20 Years

By Christopher Punongbayan

In May, the Senate passed S 2611, the Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2006. The bill was the result of months of debate between the Democrat and Republican parties, the former supporting a limited legalization program for undocumented immigrants, the latter backing an enforcement-only approach. The debate ignited some of the largest civil demonstrators since the civil rights era of the 1950s and 1960s.

Beginning in March of this year, Bay Area communities began making public demands for genuine legalization and an end to the harsh enforcement policies that have torn apart immigrant families. First, there was a weeklong hunger strike at the federal building in San Francisco. On April 10 and April 23, there were marches and protests throughout the Bay Area. Finally, on May 1, there was a nationwide protest and boycott for immigrant rights. FAA and several other Filipino organizations joined in all of these actions.

Immigration has been a very divisive issue

for our country, and even within our own Filipino community. The needs of Filipino immigrants are great, and some would prefer to see short-term results rather than continue with the status quo. But, we must remember that our community's interests are not the only interests at stake. We must stand for the rights of all immigrants and working-class people, and not settle for compromises that will jeopardize the safety of immigrants as a whole.

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The future of immigration reform is not clear. The Senate bill must be reconciled with the much-maligned House bill, HR 4437. That bill contains provisions that would make undocumented immigrant status a federal crime, and would also criminalize all those who provide assistance to undocumented immigrants, including church and non-

profit organizations. Meanwhile, President Bush continues to push for his guestworker program, and is at odds with his own party on the issue.

The common denominator of both bills is strict enforcement. Both bills take a heavy-handed approach to dislocated workers' need to survive. Both bills require employers to verify the immigration status of their employees, build hundreds of miles of walls between the U.S. and Mexico, create tens of thousands of new detention beds, reduce immigrants' access to the courts, transform local police in immigration agents, and more.

We at FAA would like to hear your opinion or own immigration story. Do you support fair and humane treatment for immigrants? Have you been waiting for years to be united with your family? Do you think we need to deport people who are out-of-status? Please contact Chris Punongbayan at chrisp@filipinos4action.org or 510-465-9876 x304 to share your thoughts.



"If we don't think differently, everything will stay the same." Message on a wall in Altar, Mexico, where immigrants rest and prepare themselves for the trek across the Arizona border.

With a Small Backpack and a Gallon Jug of Water

By Lillian Galedo

I was privileged to participate in a recent delegation to the U.S. / Mexico border, June 15 - 18, 2006, hosted by La Coalicion de Derechos Humanos of Tucson, Arizona and the National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (NNIRR). Delegates learned how irrational, misdirected and inhumane U.S. border policy is; not really intended to meet it's stated objective of stopping migration. It is instead a war against the poorest of the poor.

Policies like the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) are undermining Mexican economic growth and forcing the massive displacement of workers. Since NAFTA in 1996, there has been a 300% increase in migration. The U.S. deals with this migration by further militarizing the border through initiatives like Operation Gatekeeper, a policy that is nothing more than a low intensity war on migrants. The deployment of 1600 National Guard while we were there made that analysis crystal clear. This war on migrants is spreading to the interior with border checkpoints on main roads 25 miles north of the border and congressional proposals to deputize local city police to assist border patrol.

Operation Gatekeeper expanded and reinforced the fence between the U.S. and Mexico border to channel migrants into a 60-mile swath of desert where

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MISSION STATEMENT

Filipinos for Affirmative Action's mission is to build a strong and empowered Filipino community by organizing constituents, developing leaders, providing services, and advocating for policies that promote social and economic justice and equity.

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Legislative Update

Protecting the Rights of Voters of Color

The Voting Rights Act is a law that was passed in 1965 during the civil rights era. Recently, Congress and the President re-authorized the sections of the Act that were set to expire in August 2007, including Section 5 and Section 203. Section 5 protects voters, primarily African American, in parts of the country where discrimination has blocked access to the polls. Section 203 ensures that voters, primarily Asian American and Latinos, have Language Assistance when they cast their vote. Today, there are six counties throughout the country that provide interpretation and translation assistance in Tagalog: San Diego, Santa Clara, Los Angeles, Honolulu, Maui, and Kodiak Island Borough (in Alaska). But the work is not over. As we know, there was widespread voter of color disenfranchisement in the 2000 and 2004 national elections, most notably in Florida. The administration must stop turning a blind eye to the ongoing civil rights violations against our nation's voters of color.

Advancing the Rights of Household Workers

AB 2536 is a bill supported by the California Household Workers Coalition, a group made up of organizations across the state that organize workers in the domestic setting. FAA is a member as well as the Pilipino Workers Center in Southern California. The California Assembly recently passed AB 2536, which would provide improved labor rights for a certain category of household workers called personal attendants. The bill is now making its way through the California Senate. Take the time today to tell legislators to support the bill by visiting the website: www.local-impact.org and clicking on "Household Workers."

World War II Veterans Still Struggling for Equity

Filipino World War II veterans are still waiting for justice to be served. The Filipino Veterans Equity Act has not moved in Congress despite having 39 co-sponsors in the House of Representatives and 8 co-sponsors in the Senate. Sixty years ago, Filipino World War II veterans were stripped of their status as "veterans" even though they fought and died alongside U.S. soldiers during the war. In 1990, they won the right to naturalize to U.S. citizenship, but are still waiting to be recognized as equals as their American counterparts. Take the time to contact your congressional representatives to urge their support.

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temperatures can reach 115+ degrees – a literal death trap. With a small backpack and a gallon jug of water in each hand migrants attempt the perilous crossing. In 2005 the remains of 927 people were found; 196 were never identified. Remains reveal increasing numbers of women and children who attempt the crossing. With 10,000 to 15,000 deported back to Mexico from the Tucson sector alone there are probably 10 times more deaths than remains found.

This count doesn't reflect those who die on the Mexico side before reaching the border or who are deported and die later after having sustained injuries and health problems complicated by the desert heat. Mexico doesn't keep records.

Samaritans, people of faith and conscience, on both sides of the border run projects, like No More Deaths, that leave out water and supplies on a daily basis for migrants to find on their journey. The Samaritans patrol the desert and arroyos for the sick, injured and for remains. They have become the most vocal advocates, encouraging Arizona residents

not be afraid to offer aid to migrants in distress, and to call upon our government to end border deaths and inhumane immigration policies.

"State provoked violence" is what the Samaritans call U.S. border policy. Republicans and Democrats both are responsible they say. 1996 surfaced the notion that immigration policy should be linked to anti-terrorism policy, reinforced by the events of September 11. "Migration is not a crime," they say. "It's a right of people whose families are starving. A naturally occurring phenomenon that can't be stopped. An instinct for survival. Like seeds that are scattered and seek water, you can't stop human beings. They are brave people, willing to endure hardship and sacrifice for the survival and improvement of their families."

Given the dislocation capitalist expansion is creating around the world, we have to deepen our understanding of migration they say. "Mexican migration is the exploitable labor of the 21st century," says Raquel Rubio-Goldsmith. "One day we will look at illegal aliens the same

way we look at slavery," says Jim Corbetts. "To expose modern day slavery, we have to counter the extreme nationalism that is being whipped up by repeated messages that poor people are breaking the law by simply seeking survival."

The solution is in the hands of advocates in the U.S. they say. "Exercise your right to reject your governments border policies and immigration proposals." Plans to increase militarization of the border exists in both the House and Senate immigration reform bills.

Delegates returned home inspired to support migrants rights efforts -- on both sides of the border -- to stop border deaths and make it possible for people to have decent jobs and live dignified lives at home. The current national debate on immigration reform is an opportunity to correct the grave injustice that is being leveled against the poor of the world.

Stop militarization of the border and certain death for migrants. Advocate for just and humane immigration reform.

Youth Leaders Fight For School Resources

Fifty-two years ago the groundbreaking Brown vs Board of Education Supreme Court Decision acknowledged that the U.S. public education system was separate and unequal, and promised to provide all students a quality education regardless of their color. Today, California's education system remains strikingly unchanged. A majority of the state's schools lack safe buildings and facilities, as well as textbooks and learning materials for each student and many teachers are not fully credentialed.

Based on this analysis, AYPAL (Asian and Pacific Islander Youth Promoting Advocacy and Leadership) youth leaders organized a campaign to improve Oakland schools by using a powerful tool called the Williams Complaint Process. Through the Williams Complaint Process schools can tap into money the state has set aside for emergency repairs, textbooks, and classroom supplies. AYPAL collected 796 complaints from Oakland teachers, parents, students and community members.

"We filed these complaints because we want all of our schools to have equal education like schools in rich neighborhoods," said Rose Ann Leybag, 17. A few examples of the problems reported in the complaints include leaking ceilings, mis-assigned teachers or teacher vacancies for up to four months, vermin, and not enough textbooks or lab equipment for each student in the class.

AYPAL worked closely with local youth organizations such as Youth Together and Californians For Justice,



Sule Chea of AYPAL and Tracy Enskip of Youth Together reporting on the findings from the 796 Williams complaint forms.



At an Oakland accountability session, organized by youth approximately 200 concerned community members urge officials to improve education.

legal advocacy group Public Advocates, as well as school principles to send the message that basic education is a right for every student. In addition to collecting complaint forms, the youth made educational presentations to other youth groups. In order to get the word out to the community, AYPAL organized a block party in Oakland's Fruitvale District with information booths, games, and Williams complaint forms on hand.

On May 17, 2006 - the actual anniversary of Brown vs Board of Education decision - AYPAL and Youth Together hosted an accountability session with key elected officials in the Oakland Unified School District, the Oakland City Council, and the County of Alameda. More than 200 concerned community members listened and cheered as Oakland School Board members David Kakishiba, Dan Siegel, and Gregory Hodge gave statements of solidarity for students' efforts to improve their learning conditions. Alameda County Superintendent of Schools, Sheila Jordan, weighed-in by encouraging the student organizers to continue fighting until AYPAL's demands were met.

A high point of the accountability session was a direct dialogue between students and representatives of the Oakland Unified School District. Students stood up at a microphone in front of the crowd, directly facing the district representatives, and asked pointed questions about school conditions, the Williams settlement, and its implementation. The district response was cooperative and expressed a commitment to resolve the chronic problems facing the public schools.

For more information about the AYPAL youth program, the campaign, or how to fill out Williams Complaint forms please call (510) 465-9876 x 310.

Youth Conduct Survey of Violence at Logan High

The Regional Alliance for Community Empowerment (RACE) is a youth leadership development project currently focusing on preventing violence at James Logan High School.

To understand how students felt about the violence on campus, RACE interns with advice and support from the National Council on Crime and Delinquency, Inc (NCCDI) surveyed 200 students and hosted two focus groups on campus and one at the FAA office. The goal of the focus groups was to hear from youth how they are affected by violence and to get their input on possible solutions to prevent violence.

Interns also interviewed volunteers from VOICES (a violence prevention curriculum and alternative to suspension program at Logan High) and Logan High staff including: the principal, vice principals, teachers, administration staff, and campus security to discuss the violence on campus and get their input on possible solutions.

One outcome of the community study is the important role VOICES (Violence Prevention Outreach Intervention Community Building Empowerment Services) plays in preventing violence at Logan High. The VOICES program is aimed at rehabilitating students as opposed to just punishing them. Instead of serving the full suspension away from school with little opportunity to resolve the issues that lead to the violent acts, students in the VOICES program have an opportunity to reduce their suspension days by participating in VOICES as an alternative to suspension. For example, if a student were given a 5-day suspension for violence on campus, that student would

only serve 2 of the 5 suspension days away from school and the other 3 days would be spent in a classroom participating in the VOICES program. While the student still could not return to their regular class schedule for 5 days, only 2 suspension days would show on their transcript since the other 3 days would be spent in the violence prevention workshop. With a waiting list of over 60 students at the end of the school year, there is a need for more staff and funding to meet the demands.

The RACE interns hope to complete their study by the end of August and will share their findings with school officials in the beginning of the next academic year.

For more information on the survey results contact RACE interns at 510-487-8552.



Members of the Pilipino Youth Coalitions from South Alameda & San Mateo counties, surrounding comedian Rex Navarette at the FANHS conference in Hawaii on June 29, 2006, presented an "off the hook" workshop on Youth Activism in the Bay Area. Of all the workshops in the conference, their's had the highest attendance.

Medicare Part D Deadline Stays

The May 15 deadline for free enrollment with Medicare Part D was not extended. The Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) reported 872,000 people enrolled during the final week of the Part D open enrollment season. Last minute enrollees using the medicare.gov website and the 800 Medicare Helpline generated more than 2.2 million calls and 15 million web site hits. However, there are reports of unsuccessful attempts to reach a counselor or access Medicare's enrollment web tools.

Because of the prospect of a lifetime of late penalties, key congressional leaders proposed legislation to waive the late penalties. Medicare Late Enrollment assistance Act had 31 cosponsors as of May 22.

AARP partnering with United Health Care garnered the most enrollees in part D plans. AARP issued a statement in support of the Senate late penalty legislation. "Imposing a penalty on Medicare beneficiaries who failed to enroll in the Medicare prescription drug program during the initial enrollment period of a new program would be unfair," wrote AARP CEO William Norelli.

The Filipino collaborative on Medicare part D (which included the Veterans Equity Center, Pilipino Bayanihan Resource Center, and Filipino American Social Services) reached over 800 people and assisted nearly 200 seniors with Medicare Part D issues. In their final me

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available to beneficiaries, the automatic enrollment in a plan that has higher co-pays than other plans adds confusion to the situation. Beneficiaries who don't update their whereabouts with the Social Security Administration won't get adequate information or their drug plan membership card on time.

Many eligible beneficiaries of Medicare Part D may not have been reached by May 15. Call FAA with your questions or for more information 510 465-9876

Advancing Social Justice: Honoring our history, building our future

On May 13, 2006, FAA brought together Filipino community organizations, community leaders, youth activists and others interested in issues affecting the Filipino community. We met at the First Unitarian Church in Oakland for a daylong event featuring speakers and various workshops on issues like immigration reform, youth development, civic participation and worker support to name a few. The theme “Advancing Social Justice: Honoring our history, building our future” reflected the Centennial celebration of Filipino immigration to America that formally started in 1906.

Noting, in the civic participation workshop, that there are more than 2.5 million Filipinos in America, Galedo heralded the growing political power of Filipinos in the Bay Area. “We have the potential to have a major impact at the ballot box,” referring to the 400,000 Filipinos living in the Bay Area. Agnes Briones-Ubalde, Director of the Small Business Commission for the City of San Francisco, echoed Galedo’s statement in her opening keynote address, but noted the economic disparities amongst Filipinos in the workforce that we also need to overcome.

“Filipinos still get paid less than their counterparts,” said Briones-Ubalde. “It is that Bayanihan spirit that has allowed us to fight discrimination.”

At the Civic Participation workshop, Dexter Ligot-Gordon, pointed out that “Electoral politics is a numbers game.” The number of registered voters ranged from a low of



Dean Alegado, Professor at the Univ. of Hawaii, presents a slideshow of Fil-Am history to commemorate the Centennial. Participants in the Youth Workshop discuss their common issues.

1.44% in Los Angeles County to a high of 3.69% in Solano County. Statewide, Filipinos only account for 1.34% of all registered voters. “I’m disillusioned with both political parties. I hate them both,” said Mitchell Yangson, one of the youth in the workshop.

Professor Dean Alegado, the lunchtime keynote speaker, shared “Singgalot” a photographic history of Filipino Americans. He is instrumental in compiling the Smithsonian Institute exhibit on the Centennial that opens in Washington, D.C. His slideshow included images from Louisiana’s Filipino Cajuns, Filipino natives displayed at the 1904 St. Louis Exposition, the Manongs of the 1920’s to Cristeta Comerford, the White House executive chef. The exhibit will be traveling to U.S. cities for the next two years.

Immigration reform and the impact of ending bills in Congress drew a large crowd. The workshop attempted to answer everyone’s questions about the specifics of and differences between the House and Senate bills. The point made by all the presenters was that increasing enforcement against immigrants, won’t stop types of programs, our youth programs and the youth they serve will become stronger advocates for the community,” said Chris Cara, FAA staff person.

“Issues like immigration reform and attacks on the undocumented will continue to challenge the Filipino community for years to come. Conferences like this help the community analyze the issues, and learn the skills needed to advance the social justice agenda of the Filipino community by learning from the past and building for the future.” said conference participant Mel Orpilla.

-Thanks to Mel Orpilla for contributing to this article.



The Fight for Filipino WWII Veterans Equity Continues

Members of local community organizations including various guest speakers from the SF Board of Supervisors, voiced their support for the Veterans.

Filipino youth and students continue to remember the daily struggles of Filipino WWII veterans as they drive to end a 60-year injustice. On Monday, July 24th, members of S.A.V.E., Students Action for Veterans Equity held a press conference at the steps of San Francisco City hall to kick off a week of action to commemorate the induction of Filipino soldiers into the US Armed Forces during WWII. Advocate for Congress to pass H.R. 4574 and S. 146, the Filipino Veterans Equity Acts, and urge the community to get involved in this issue.

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Attendees of the Filipino American National Historical Society (FANHS) conference visited a farming cooperative setup by former Dole plantation farmworkers on the island of Oahu, Hawaii. The farmworkers are the descendants of Filipino Sakadas, who came to work the sugar plantations over a hundred years ago.

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