

## **NATIONAL IMMIGRATION FORUM**

**Moderator: Ali Noorani**  
**October 23, 2009**  
**12:00 pm CT**

Operator: Good day and welcome to the Immigration Reform conference call. Today's call is being recorded.

At this time, I would like to turn the conference over to Mr. Ali Noorani. Please go ahead, sir.

Ali Noorani: Great. Thank you very much. My name is Ali Noorani. I'm the Executive Director of the National Immigration Forum.

I want to welcome everybody to today's conference call to announce the important leadership step that Congressman Joe Crowley, from New York, has taken, to gather 110 of his colleagues within the House of Representatives to send a letter to the President of the United States, where - in this letter these 111 signatories reaffirm America's tradition as both a nation of laws and a nation built on the strength of immigrants.

The letter goes on to say, "Reforming our immigration system is not only about recognizing and honoring the contributions of immigrants to our country, both past and present, but about protecting our nation, our communities, and our families. We look forward to working with you, the President, to pass comprehensive immigration reform."

The leadership that Congressman Crowley has shown echoes and builds on the leadership that is being shown across the country. Just last week, over 25,000 phone calls and faxes were put into members of Congress in less than 36 hours; 8000 people gathered in Washington, D.C., which included over nearly 1000 from across the country, to rally for comprehensive immigration reform.

On October 15, in Santa Clara, leadership from Idaho to Los Angeles gathered also, to rally for comprehensive immigration reform. Just in that one week or October 13, not only did we have these 25,000 phone calls, (9000) people rallying, but we also had 36 other events happening in 20 states, all of which generated nearly 100 pages in local and national press clips.

It is clear that the country is articulating pushing for comprehensive immigration reform. And it's the leadership of people like Congressman Crowley, with the House of Representatives, that brings this goal of comprehensive immigration just a little bit closer.

Joining us today, along with the Congressman, will be Javier Valdes, Deputy Director of Make the Road New York, and Chung-Wha Hong, Executive Director of the New York Immigration Coalition.

But to start the panel, I want to welcome Congressman Crowley and thank him for the incredible leadership that he showed, not only on this letter, but the leadership that he has shown since the day that he stepped into office. So Congressman Crowley, thank you for joining us.

Joseph Crowley: Well thank you, Ali. Let me thank you and the other folks at the National Immigration Forum. I also want to thank my friends at Make the Road New York. And I would be remiss if I didn't Chung-Wha Hong and our friends at the New Immigration Coalition, as well as everyone participating in the call today, around the country, who are advocating on behalf of immigrants

here today, and for all the tireless work that they've been dedicating themselves to towards comprehensive immigration reform and making that a reality.

As many of you know, I'm the child and grandchild of immigrants, and a Representative, I think, of probably the most diverse district, certainly in the country, probably the most diverse place in the entire global. And I've seen the need for comprehensive immigration reform first hand.

There's not question that our current system has failed us. And we have an outdate immigration system, one that divides families and communities, and in effect, it also provides for ineffective enforcement strategies.

What we need is common sense solutions and a uniquely American solution, that secures the border, protects the rights of all workers, and modernizes our legal immigration programs.

In addition to be a cosponsor of the STRIVE Act, the comprehensive immigration reform bill in the 110th Congress, as a Chief Deputy, I led the Democratic Caucus effort to pass reform by working with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle.

I'm happy to continue working with Representative Luis Gutierrez, a good friend of mine from Chicago, to pass legislation he's getting ready to introduce in the Congress and to work the passage of comprehensive reform in the House and in the Senate, and getting it signed into law.

I was appointed the point person on the Whip team by House Democratic leadership, to lead the education effort amongst my colleagues and try and find consensus amongst all the caucuses within our party and in the entire House of Representatives Chamber, on moving forward on comprehensive reform. I am committed to reaching out to the various caucuses in Congress, as well as my colleagues on both sides of the aisle.

In June, I had the privilege of attending and being asked to attend a White House briefing by the President, which was President Obama's initial step in reaching out to Congress and looking for allies. I believe that the fact that the President began discussions on the issue is a very good omen, a very good sign.

Until recently, the White House has said it hopes to tackle immigration reform in the fall of this year; however, with the number of legislative priorities on the table, not the least of which is healthcare and global warming, the timeline for immigration remains uncertain.

To keep momentum for comprehensive immigration reform going, I led a Congressional sign-on letter to President Obama with a diverse of 111 members from a wide variety of caucuses supporting moving ahead with comprehensive immigration reform before the end of this year. It is clear to me that the Obama Administration wants to reform our broken immigration system.

Instead of previous immigration enforcement strategies have focused on symbolic gestures, President Obama has focused on effective and real reforms, requesting funding in his budget not only for border protection, which is vital, but also to invest in and help immigrants in our country as well.

Any version of immigration reform would likely focus primarily on cracking down on bad actor employers who violate immigration law and tax laws, combined with the legalization of workers and families already contributing and living here in the U.S. This approach will lift wages for Americans and immigrant workers alike, enhance tax fairness and boost revenues, and create a level playing field for honest employers.

A lot of good work is being done in Congress now and I want to particularly call to attention Congresswoman Nydia Velazquez, who has been a leader on this issue, but unfortunately was

not able to join us today, and Congressman Luis Gutierrez. Both have been working hard to focus on solutions as opposed to simply the problems of our broken immigration system.

Groups like the Congressional Hispanic Caucus and the Asian-Pacific American Caucus have been both vital throughout this effort. And I look forward to continuing to work with them and other caucuses throughout the House.

And the other bodies, Senator Schumer, who chairs the Senate Immigration Subcommittee, is working very closely with Congresswoman Zoe Lofgren here in the House, who chairs the Immigration Subcommittee and the Judiciary Committee. And they have also held numerous hearings on the economic, social, and moral imperatives behind comprehensive immigration reform.

Clearly there is a lot more work that still needs to be done, but we have a group of people at the core of this debate who are willing to do what is best for our constituency. But, more importantly, they're willing to fight for what's in the best interest of our nation.

We have seen in recent elections and at the October 13 day of action that the immigrant community has a strong voice, and that they will use that strong voice in this fight. The momentum is there now to enact comprehensive immigration reform. And I look forward to the day that we can be at a bill signing with President Obama to make that a reality.

So with that, I'll turn it back to you, Ali.

Ali Noorani: Great. Thank you, Congressman, and thank you again for all the work that you are doing, not only within the Democratic Party, but as you said, working across the aisle.

Our next speaker is Javier Valdes. Javier is the Deputy Director of Make the Road New York, an immigrant-based group with over 7000 members in Brooklyn, Queens, and Staten Island. Javier?

Javier Valdes: Thank you, Ali.

And first of all I want to thank our very own Congressman, Congressman Crowley, who represents our area in Queens, for really spearheading this effort and kind of showing the urgency behind the need for immigration reform. Congressman Crowley has seen the positive impact that immigrants have had in Queens, both socially and economically, and he said, representing the most diverse district, not only in the United States, but probably in the world. Seeing all immigrants come together, it's only a positive for everybody.

As an organization that represents members from all parts of Latin America, we are seeing the need to repair this very broken system. We continue to see a system that is moving forward with only enforcement measures, so what we really is reform.

To kind of highlight the need for immigration reform, I want to tell, quickly, a brief story of one of our members. Her name is Rubiela Arias. She is 46. She comes from Columbia, and she moved to the United States over 11 years ago, with her 5-year-old son, seeking a better place.

After the horrific attacks of 9/11, Rubiela was one of the first people that went to Ground Zero and helped in the cleanup and was there for six months helping cleanup Ground Zero. Because of this, and because she wanted to help out, she now has a lot of health issues that she has to deal, and she was just recently diagnosed with cancer.

Right now she is undocumented. She has no papers and she's one of those people here that really needs the help -- we need to pass immigration reform. Families are continually being torn apart. We need to get this done.

And the immigrant community, what we're trying to say today is that we know that it is an uphill fight, but we're committed, we're focused and we're disciplined to get this done as soon as possible.

As the Congressman has said, it's been really great to see New York play a key leadership role and so we want to really again, thank Congressman Crowley, thank Congresswoman Nydia Velazquez, as the Chair of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, for doing her part, and also Senator Schumer, who's also going to be doing his part. So I think New York is set to lead the stage because New York City has shown that we can incorporate immigrants in a way that makes it a win-win for everybody. So thank you.

Ali Noorani: Great. Thank you, Javier.

Our next speaker is Chung-Wha Hong, Executive Director of the New York Immigration Coalition, an advocate group representing nearly 200 organizations in New York State. Chung-Wha?

Chung-Wha Hong: Thanks so much, Ali. My name is Chung-Wha Hong, and the New York Immigration Coalition has about 200 member organizations throughout New York State, working on advocacy issues. And with immigration reform being really one of our top priorities of hundreds of immigrant organizations, and millions of immigrants.

And I'd like to thank Congressman Crowley for his efforts and leadership with this letter and overall. I want to just make brief comments, but start with President Obama's own words in 2008. He said, "I think it's time for a President who won't walk away from something as important as comprehensive immigration reform, just because it becomes politically unpopular. I will make it a top priority in my first year as President of the United States of America."

So that was a promise that was made in 2008, and that was one of the key reasons why millions of Latinos and immigrants voted for change. Unfortunately, so far, immigrant communities have been subject to more of the same, the same Bush-era enforcement tactics that break up families and that have mass detentions and mass firings and mass deportations. And so it's worth noting that this year the number of deportations have increased 18% to 270,000 people just in the last nine months.

And so all this is to say that immigrants are increasingly frustrated, because they had high expectations for change this year, as President Obama had promised. So that is something, the timeline for reform, very important.

In addition to the timeline, I think that the moment is now for House leadership in jump starting the legislative process. And so we're tremendously excited that there's going to be a strong reform legislation introduced this year in the House to jump start the legislative process. And immigrant communities are ready to fully support that offer this year.

Finally, in order for that to happen, I think as other speakers noted that the leadership of the New York Congressional delegation is indispensable. This letter is just one example. Out of over 100 people who signed onto this letter, 18 members were from New York State. So we have a strong cohort lead by Congressman Crowley and also the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, Chair Nydia Velazquez. And so we have kind of a dream team here in New York and working closely with the on the ground field groups, I think we're uniquely situated to push the reform forward.

As for the field groups, New York State is proud to be running a strong statewide field operation that's a part of the Reform Immigration for America Campaign that the forum is meeting. And we have a significant, both electoral mobilization capacity, able to mobilize in last year 50,000 voters throughout the state, mostly new immigrant voters. And we're a part of a national text messaging

action network that has 68,000 people nationally, generating tens of thousands of calls into the Congressional offices.

And so we really look forward to another whole level of advocacy and collaboration with the Congressional leadership and the grassroots community to make this happen this year.

So thank you very much for this important action, the sign-on letter that helps to build the momentum that we need for legislative action.

Ali Noorani: Great. Thank you, Chung-Wha.

Operator, if you can walk us through please, the question-and-answer process?

Operator: Yes, sir. The question-and-answer will be conducted electronically. If you would like to ask a question, please do so by pressing the star key followed by the 1 on your touchtone telephone. If you are using a speakerphone, please make sure your mute function is turned off to allow your signal to reach our equipment. We will proceed in the order that you signal us, and we'll take as many questions as time permits. Once again, please press star 1 to ask a question. We'll pause for just a moment to give everyone an opportunity to signal.

And we'll take our first question from Erica Gonzalez with El Diario.

Erica Gonzalez: Hello, all. Thanks for all the information.

Congressman, my question is what do you think the fallout will be for Democrats if they're not able to push immigration reforms through this year, or rather into the spring of next year?

Joseph Crowley: Well, I do think that's a good question. It requires me to have a bit of a crystal ball, which I don't have at hand. I think that most Americans understand that the legislative process is not something that is predictable, many times. A lot of factors are involved in that.

What I'd rather do is maybe just give you my sense as to why it's important to act sooner rather than later. And that is because I think the further we go into next year on this issue, it obviously puts us further into the first election since the President has taken office. And the longer we go down that road the more difficult I think is to address this issue, purely from a political standpoint. And I think if we fail to do it next year, it makes it more difficult for the President -- you start to go into the Presidential reelection cycle after that.

So I do think that that's something the White House understands. I think that our leadership also understands that as well, that time is of the essence, and we really do need to move more expeditiously to accomplish this.

In terms of what the fallout will be, I think what I would say is this -- I think, as demonstrated in the last election and I think consistently over these number of elections, that the American people recognize that more often than not the heart of the effort to reform in a comprehensive way, our immigration policy has been led by the Democratic caucus and party. I don't think that will be lost upon them.

I think that there may be levels of frustration that are expressed, but I think all-in-all, if one were to take a poll, even today, I think clearly that the Democrats have shown the leadership here and will continue to do so.

I also almost don't want even dwell on that as much as focusing on what we need to do to get this done -- and get it done now -- (it's really) more and more important.

But I do appreciate the question and I hope I answered it sufficiently.

Erica Gonzalez: Thank you.

Male: Thank you, Congressman. And I should say that from the perspective of the campaign to Reform Immigration for America, you know, we have created an infrastructure across the country that is solely focused on identifying and securing the 279 votes that we need to move and pass immigration reform -- that's 218 in the House, 60 in the Senate, with signature of our President. And the reality is that, you know, it will need to be a bipartisan piece of legislation, but that's why the leadership of members, such as Congressman Crowley, who experience and a track record to work across the aisle (fortunately).

Joseph Crowley: And I just realized and remembered something myself, and I just asked my staff to go to find out what the amendment was. But, just the other day, as an example, Erica, there was an amendment in the Financial Services Committee dealing with Reg. relation reform, Reg. reform, in which the Republican caucus offered an English-only amendment that all their side voted for, the Republicans voted for -- Democrats clearly defeated it. But, I mean once again this demonstrates, I think, you know, in terms of how we approach these issues and I think the American people see through that.

Ali Noorani: Great. Thank you. Can we get the next question please?

Operator: Yes, sir. Now we'll hear from Sylvia Struthers with La Voz Houston Chronicle.

Sylvia Struthers: Yes, good afternoon.

Representative Crowley, we recently heard that the National Association of Evangelicals approved immigration reform. I think it took them like three years to get to the decision. Did you

think that this could help gather Republican support? And are there any Republican representatives open to an immigration reform bill?

Joseph Crowley: If you could just (say) who passed that again? I'm sorry.

Sylvia Struthers: The National Association of Evangelicals.

Joseph Crowley: Yes, okay.

Sylvia Struthers: On October 15.

Joseph Crowley: Yes, I think that's actually a very good sign, in terms of that support. I think that again led to the more further right within the caucus that there seems to be some growing support within the evangelical movement for a comprehensive reform. I think that could be a positive for the Republican Caucus.

Sylvia Struthers: Okay. And in regards to any Republican support right now for the immigration bill?

Joseph Crowley: There is some support. I know that Jeff Flake, from Arizona, for one, has been someone that's been supportive of comprehensive reform. And interestingly enough, I think that many of the folks that are in favor of comprehensive reform tend to be from the border states, and I think that the Republicans understand even there, what the ramifications of doing nothing are. So Jeff is one.

Unfortunately, we have lost some of our moderate members within the Republican Caucus, others who had been supportive in the past year. (Maws) from Upstate New York, for instance, was supportive, who lost his seat. He retired in the last Congress, as well as others.

So we're on the mark and on the move to find new support within the Republican Caucus here in the House. But certainly in the Senate there is signs of support. I know that Senator McCain has shown. Lindsey Graham has stepped up as the new go-to person maybe in the Senate on comprehensive immigration reform.

So I do think that especially in the Senate, but want in the House as well, we need to bring a bipartisan solution to this overall issue.

Ali Noorani: Before, we move to the next question, Javier or Chung-Wha, do you want to talk briefly (on any) of the work that you've been doing within the community, because it is a pretty significant step forward for the National Association of Evangelicals? I know that you have been doing work locally on that.

Chung-Wha Hong: Sure. In New York, we have organized over 30 safe institutions, from all over the spectrum to work together for immigration reform. And so they're going deeply into congregations, synagogues, mosques, and they've held prayer vigils and have really highlighted the moral message.

But, I think a part of the reason why we feel that we have brought a broader base of support for immigration reform is that these are faith communities who had the awareness two years, but were not organized. But, they are organized just like the Latino Evangelicals are better organized. The interfaith communities organize into a specific coalition for immigration reform.

So I think that having additional sectors of advocates and communities, like the religious community, and that's a part of a trend of the business community becoming more organized, I think the labor unions are getting more on the same page about the agenda. So these are all things pointing to why we're better positioned or the conditions are better for us to be pushing for immigration reform.

Ali Noorani: Javier?

Javier Valdes: Well I think one thing that we've seen in particular from our membership is that the Latino Evangelical churches have increased in congregation size, and I think that has created some kind of impact. You know, as someone alluded to, they have been more organized recently for October 13. We actually went down and shared a bus with a Latino Evangelical church in the Bronx, and it was a great experience for our members to be there and communicating.

And even though there might be some differences on other issues, I think they were very aligned around the need for immigration reform. And the ((inaudible)) to me is a tour that happened earlier this year, has shown the ability to connect interstate, so they can worship around the country on one issue. So I think more than ever, we're united around the need for immigration reform.

Joseph Crowley: This is Congressman Crowley again.

Another thought that came to my mind -- it showed the powerful effect of religious organizations lending their support to this. And the more I think the evangelical movement towards the Latino, in particular, Evangelical, moving towards the need for more comprehensive reform -- is I hearken back to the Catholic Church's involvement in immigration reform, and its ability to talk to organized labor and work together with them, as we saw in New York.

I mean very effectively, the AFL-CIO and the Central Labor Council working in conjunction with the Catholic Church is really, I think, more of a holistic approach towards of the need for comprehensive reform and extending that out to the Evangelical and other Protestant communities and other religions. We welcome all to participate. And so I think that's really a way to get at literally the heart of the matter.

Ali Noorani: Thank you. Can we get the next question, please, operator?

Operator: Yes, sir. We'll go to Richard Jones with El Hispanic News.

Richard Jones: Good morning -- or good afternoon, where you are. Could you outline some specific steps that the bill would include that would have reasonable chance of acceptance by both parties?

Joseph Crowley: Well I think that's still being put together in the effort here to work to put something that would have support of both parties.

Let me give you in broad terms, one, I could tell you that any of the reform that would likely be debated this year will focus primarily, again, on cracking down, as I mentioned before the bad actors, bad employers, who violate immigration laws we have today and the labor law and the tax laws. That's something that I think has both the widespread support on both sides of the aisle.

I think that also it'll be about the DREAM Act, giving opportunity for the young people to really attain their dreams of higher education by allowing to access student loans. And at the same time provide for more H1B visas potentially in this legislation, so that the business community, any entity that the Republican Caucus has been more (socially) aligned with in the past -- that they can look to and say here's something that, you know, we're supportive of.

Securing the borders more, and putting some emphasis on border patrols and on doing more to secure the border to prevent or to end illegal immigration as we know it, I think is also something that will move towards bringing this into a bipartisan way. So those are just a couple of the issues.

But, I think all that, without addressing the human element, I think would all be for not. And that's where I think we have the more difficult time, is to convince our colleagues. But, not an impossible task -- that we need to do this in a holistic way and that is to take care of the human element and make those that now find themselves in a subculture to be brought into the light of day and contributing as full citizens or at least legally here fully to our society.

Richard Jones: How about immediate recognition of immigrants who are already in this country giving them some sort of status or some sort of plan to work for towards citizenship?

Joseph Crowley: Well that I think ultimately has been a part of the legislation in the past and I anticipate that it will be a part of legislation ((inaudible)) going forward as well. That's what I was talking about in the end, the human element. That needs to be addressed.

Ali Noorani: Thank you. Can we get the next question, please?

Operator: Yes, sir. We'll open the line up to The Queens Chronicle Willow Belden.

Willow Belden: Yes. My question is for Javier and Chung-Wha, and we just heard it from Crowley, some of the aspects that the bill might include. I wanted to hear from you guys what the most important things are that you would like to see in immigration reform?

Javier Valdes: This is Javier. Well as far as from the perspective from our membership it seems one of the key components that we're looking for in any reform is the ability to have the pathway to citizenship. And I think that's very important.

The other part that we think is key is the ability, and what we call the future flow, the ability to also not recognize the people that are here, but I'm thinking about who's going to be coming in the future. And I think that's two very key components for our community.

And then the worker protections is always vital and important, as you can probably see from Queens, where there's a lot of issues around waste, et cetera. And more resources invested into workforce development and to help immigrants integrate into the United States.

Ali Noorani: And Chung-Wha?

Chung-Wha Hong: Yes, we are all on the same page about the immigration reform platform. In fact, Willow, we'd be happy to email you the immigration campaigns platform which those are the same elements. I would add that the emphasis on the family unity to the need to clear up the family, ((inaudible)) the backlogs and make sure the families and be reunited in a timely manner. And then this major reform and changes again to due process and, you know, rights for immigrants in detention.

Willow Belden: All right. Thanks.

Ali Noorani: Can I get the next question, please?

Operator: We will open the line up to Erick Galindo, with Hispanic Link.

Erick Galindo: Yes, I just had a brief question. Is there any timeline on when the bill is going to be introduced?

Joseph Crowley: I suspect that a bill will be introduced some time between now and November is what we're aiming for right now and working with Congressman Luis Gutierrez, who's going to be spearheading that effort. And we're working on that right now, trying to come up with a time to reintroduce the legislation.

Erick Galindo: Also have you gotten any feedback from the White House on sort of jumping the gun on immigration as a ((inaudible))?

Joseph Crowley: Yes, it's not so much jumping the gun on this. The White House had their meeting that I was invited to back in June -- there were 30 members of Congress, 12 Senators, and 18 members of the House, which I was one of at the White House. And really was more, I think, of maybe a jump starting, you know, maybe not jumping the gun; I think the gun has already been jumped -- but really jump starting with that effort was about making sure that this issue stays in the forefront.

As I mentioned earlier, there were a number of issues they're working on in Congress right now that I'm not in ((inaudible)). You know, healthcare reform, financial reg. reform, the global warming or the energy bill, the green technology bill that we've been working on as well, just to name a few.

And immigration belongs right up there. And we need to make sure that we keep it in the light of day in that the President understands that there is support and growing support for comprehensive reform, which I believe they understand they know.

Erick Galindo: Thank you very much.

Ali Noorani: Well Congressman, I think you have to run, but I wanted to just take a second to really thank you very much for, again, for the work around the letter for joining us today and I think all of us are looking forward to working with you and supporting your leadership, as we move forward.

Joseph Crowley: Well thank you, Ali. And again, you know, thank you to Javier and to Chung-Wha as well for joining us on this call. And I look forward to working with all of you and keeping in touch with the media as well, as we work throughout this process.

If there are any additional questions, if folks in the media want to give my office a call, they can us at 202-225-3965. We can answer any questions they may have on the legislation. Okay?

Thank you all. All the best.

Ali Noorani: Thank you. And then Javier and Chung-Wha, can remain on the line for another ten minutes if there's other questions.

Operator, if we can get the next question, please?

Operator: Certainly. We'll go to Luis Sarmiento with El Semanario Newspaper.

Luis Sarmiento: Yes. Good afternoon. I had a question -- well Representative Crowley is already gone, but maybe some other (authorities) will be able to get an approach. And I'm calling from Albuquerque, New Mexico, and we recently here had a forum on immigration, with the attendance of Vicente Fox, former Mexican President, and he was speaking about the necessity to understand immigration as a more complicated issue, with regards to social and economic issues.

He was mentioning the creation of the economic fund in the European Union, where every country puts 2% of their gross national product towards closing the gap, the economic differences between the countries, the members of the Union.

And my direct question would be how do you think, how close could we be from an idea of creating such a fund in North America? I mean maybe within the limits of a NAFTA Trade Agreement. Would that be something that could be outlined sometime in the near future, whereas every country in North America and some other regions of Latin America could put 2% of their national gross product towards the closing of the gaps between the countries regions?

Ali Noorani: Yes, this is Ali, from the forum. I think that, you know, for years we have really worked to understand the dynamics of countries from which immigrants come to America. And I think that we have to continue that investigation and better understand that situations in sending countries, but also within comprehensive immigration reform, you know, how do we grapple with these really, you know, significant policy questions?

So, you know, it's difficult to say this is the answer, because, you know, very quickly you head into trade policy and really global policy. But, I think it's, you know, as the immigrant advocacy community, we realize that the environment within the social and economic environment of sending countries is incredibly important in terms of understanding why people are immigrating to the U.S. and also why they would like to be able to, you know, visit family in their home country.

So, you know, we don't have language being drafted in this area, but we do realize that it's something that is very important and we do need to keep a close eye on and work with partner organizations, such as the Migration Policy Institute, who are really the true experts on it.

Could we get the next question, please?

Operator: Yes, sir. Now we'll open the line up to Telemundo's (Belen Rodriguez).

(Belen Rodriguez): Thank you very much. My question will be how many legislators or caucus are already leaning towards immigration reform at this point?

My second questions will be what exactly do you guys want that immigration reform to look like?

And the third one -- which is I think very important and critical, which is what made the other one kind of (sink) -- is there in place a plan to combat the wave of negative opinions that we will

received from the radio commentators of the right, (as they) mobilize voters to pressure legislators?

Thank you.

Ali Noorani: Great. Thank you. Well let me answer the first one, and then I'll turn it over to Javier and to Chung-Wha for the second, the next two.

But in terms of how many members of Congress we believe are leaning towards comprehensive immigration reform, I would go to the letter that Congressman Crowley organized. We now know that 111 members of the 111th Congress are in support of comprehensive immigration reform and have gone on record to push the President to introduce legislation and invest his political capital in the passing of fiscal legislation.

So we have gone from, you know, a handful that we knew about, to 111 that we now have their names on paper and that's a testament to their own leadership and leadership of Congressman Crowley.

Undoubtedly there are many more, we know of, that in our own conversation, the Congressman's conversation, that are supportive but are not yet ready to, you know, put their name on the dotted line. And that's our task as campaign, is to go from 111 to 218 in the House.

In terms of what needs to be included and the plan to combat the right, I wanted to invite Javier or Chung-Wha Hong to address either of those questions.

Chung-Wha Hong: Sure. Hello?

Male: Go ahead.

Chung-Wha Hong: Yes, sure. I think there is one example of combating some of the right wing rhetoric and kind of propagation of anti-immigrant myths, is a campaign. Are you familiar with the Basta Dobbs Campaign?

Male: No.

Chung-Wha Hong: You know, Lou Dobbs has been one of those forces who have been kind of fueling the anti-immigrant sentiments the really misinformation and just a lot of hate language that's bordering on hate speech. And so a lot of groups are up in arms. There are concerted efforts by groups like America's Voice and Media Matters -- really trying to hold these people accountable until there are campaigns to try get advertisers to take out their ads or cancel their ads.

And so there will be a direct confrontation to right wing, both media people and, you know, elected officials for that matter, because I think you are so right in your analysis that a part of poisoned the debate is the right wing hate rhetoric taking over what should have been a substantive debate and negotiation. So we're better ready to take that on this time around.

(Belen Rodriguez): Will you have like your own spokespersons in these programs and, you know, I mean the people really fully trained because my experience sometime I'm a journalist and I'm only through a month of the news media, and I have seen very few people who are effective at combating this.

Remember that radio commentators are very good at producing sound bytes and then to have an easiness to simplify something that is very complex when it comes to immigration reform. And sometimes I see that the pro-immigration or pro-reform experts, you know, that we tend to put on the air, sometimes they come as us, inarticulate or probably not fast enough on their feet to answer, you know, this effectively I would say.

Ali Noorani: So I think going to the example of the Safe Community the National Association of Evangelicals, and that is a clear example of this campaign working with new allies and raising those allies up as the leaders that they are for comprehensive immigration reform, also working with local elected officials, law enforcement and others.

But, one this we're doing as a campaign to reform immigration for America, is training leaders at the local level so that they are ready and able to speak to the media about the need for comprehensive immigration reform. We are consonant that millions are in support of immigration reform, but only, you know, a very, very small handful get on to national television or into local media. And we want to make sure that, that number increases and are investing the time and the resources to be ready.

(Belen Rodriguez): Thank you. And then my next question was what exactly do want that immigration reform to look like? What does it have to include?

Ali Noorani: So since we have a number of questions still in the queue, we'd be happy to email you the principles of the campaign, which are the elements that we would like to see in legislation. Would that be okay?

(Belen Rodriguez): Yes, sure. That's fine. Thank you.

Ali Noorani: Thank you. Can we get the next question please?

Operator: Certainly. We'll go to Marcelo Ballve, New American Media.

Marcelo Ballve: Hello. I hope you can hear me.

Male: (Yes).

Marcelo Ballve: Okay. I wanted to ask Crowley, but since he's not on the line, maybe whoever is in Washington or has a sense of this.

I think that we've seen with this healthcare debate how, you know, another issue can displace and split down the timeline for immigration reform and having that be the issue the Congress is really focused on. I've seen a few commentators that say that the mood in Congress is more leaning towards looking at banking reform and that the country and (CNN) polls seem to be pushing them more in that direction, as far as their reading the tea leaves, than immigration reform. And that it would really, politically, you know, per Congress, it would be easier for them to postpone immigration reform.

I don't know what anybody else there feels about the mood in Washington and whether else like banking reform could again delay immigration reform or not?

Ali Noorani: This is a great question, something that we're definitely hearing. We know that going into the new year there are going to be three issues...

If you wouldn't mind putting your phone on mute, that way we don't get the echo. I'm sorry.

We know that going into January 2010 there are going to be three issues that the White House and the Congress will want to push -- financial regulation, climate control, and immigration. It is our understanding that all three issues are going to be lined up shoulder-to-shoulder, and that the issue that will win will go first.

This is not to say that either climate control or financial regulations are not important issues to address for Congress and the President. But, we believe that by moving comprehensive immigration reform early in 2010 leads to a few things.

One, is that it leads to an intense electorate across the country for the midterm elections -- an intense immigrant electorate which will follow this debate very closely and which will clearly understand who has voted for immigration reform and who has voted against immigration reform. And given the fact that the country has been starving and demanding this solution to comprehensive immigration reform, we feel quite strongly that this intense electorate will turn out for the individuals who are voting for comprehensive immigration reform.

The second reason to do it early in 2010 is because it is important that Congress, Democrats or Republican, as well as the White House are investing in the immigrant community, investing their political capital in the immigrant community so that the immigrant community comes out for the 2010 census. The census is an important moment for the immigrant community to flex it's political muscle and that political muscle will respond to the movement of comprehensive immigration reform.

And then finally, I think that it's important to realize that within the climate legislation as well as financial regulation that, you know, tens of millions of dollars, if not more, are being spent by the opposition. For the first time ever, the pro-immigration reform movement has built a campaign that has organized a list that is growing by 40,000 or 50,000 people per month. Already our list is near 250,000 activists who are ready to call Congress, who have already called Congress.

We have infrastructure in over 35 states across the country and we are literally generating leadership from all points on the compass, from the labor community, from Safe, from law enforcement, and from local elected officials, as well as the immigrant community.

So I think that immigration reform has a very, very good opportunity to move in early 2010 and I think it would behoove members of Congress and the White House to get behind and move immigration reform in January.

Can we get the next question please?

Operator: Yes, sir. We'll move on to Ana Cubias with El Tiempo Latino.

Ana Cubias: Hello. Yes, my question was for Crowley too. Unfortunately he is gone but you have someone that can answer my question.

I know it was stressed that this immigration reform is time tested and is, you know, should be going on soon. And what I wanted to know is first, if you have an exact date on when this is going to be introduced by Luis Gutierrez?

And also what else needs to be done for these immigration bills to be passed? I know that the local organizations here in the D.C. area and nonprofits have said that this is a timely matter issue, because as you mentioned, next year we're going to be going into campaigns and many politics won't want to be addressing issue in the Congress. So what else needs to be done in order for the reform to pass?

Ali Noorani: Great. Thank you. I think we expect Congressman Gutierrez to introduce legislation in the middle or towards late November. In terms of what we need to do on the ground as a campaign, I'd turn it over to Javier and Chung-Wha to describe some of the work that they're doing in New York, which I think is quite honestly setting the example for the rest of the country.

Javier Valdes: This is Javier. I think that - what I can talk about it is that I think that the Latino community more than ever is better organized around this issue, where we've been able to build coalitions

among different people, different faiths, socioeconomic backgrounds, et cetera, because we see that this is something that affects all of us and we're ready to push.

I think, as we mentioned earlier, me and Chung-Wha, that this community is more organized, more disciplined, and is really experienced in how to move the legislative campaign more than ever before. So I think we're ready, we're organized, we have an ability communicate with thousands of people in very quick manner, and we're able to communicate with members of Congress and let them know that we're here and we want this to happen as soon as possible.

Chung-Wha Hong: Yes, I agree. I just want to leave people with three key words or points.

One is immigrant voters are angry, 1. Immigrant voters are very angry that they voted for change, and we're seeing more of the same.

Second key word is we need to jumpstart this legislative process this year. We need to take control of the timeline. I think it's the wrong question to be asking, well when is it going to happen? If we sit around for the White House to take action I don't think it's going to happen.

So we've got to keep hammering away at jump starting the legislative process this year. And in order for that to happen, there the key word is House leadership, that I think the House leadership has a responsibility and has an opportunity to put out a strong and inclusive reform bill to rally it's members around and the grass roots communities completely ready to go all out basically pushing for that.

We have to be the next thing and the next issue on the agenda. So immigrant voters are angry. Second it has to happen this year. And then in order for that to happen, third, we need House leadership. And finally, we're going to make that happen, in the grassroots community across the country.

Thank you very much.

Ali Noorani: Great. Thank you. And we're at 2 o'clock. If we can take one final question and then we'll have to bring this to a close, please?

Operator: Yes. We'll take our final question from Claudia Cruz with Queens Courier.

Claudia Cruz: Good afternoon everyone. I think what I've noticed and maybe you can define when you say the immigrant groups are angry, because, you know, if you're a voter, I think you're in a stronger position to lobby Congress. So I'm wondering how are the local underground grassroots organizers working to try to get citizen voters onboard with passing comprehensive immigration reform.

And then when you say immigrant voters, I'm assuming you're talking about maybe naturalized citizens and the fact that they voted for the President, and now they feel let down. Can you guys talk to me about your broad-based, not just undocumented immigrants going to Washington's rally, but everybody who you're trying to get under this umbrella to have a more unified and stronger voice?

Ali Noorani: Chung-Wha or Javier?

Chung-Wha Hong: Sure. I mean, you know, I think shared some numbers about the scale of the crisis, you know, the deportation numbers are pretty alarming, because we're looking at 18% increase in deportations, right, and not any sort of solution? So in just nine months, we're looking at almost 300,000 people who were deported in the new Administration. So I think that's very, very alarming and it's really just drawing the lines of so many immigrants.

I think what happened that last couple of years was that a real convergence. I think there used to be, you know, in the past a little bit of a separation between, you know, issues of citizenship and issues of undocumented immigrants. But, you know, through the 2006 and 2007 and so on, I think all of that came together with the slogan Today We March, Tomorrow We Vote.

And I feel like there's a unified agenda, whether you're undocumented or citizen, that we know what it's going to take to pass immigration reform, is every single citizen voting on this issue, but every single person in our community coming together to participate and taking action. You don't need to be a citizen to send a text message. You don't need to be a citizen to be counted as a part of the census. You don't need to be a citizen to, you know, meet Joe Crowley and say, you know, this is what's happening in our community.

And so I think we're really organizing all members our community, but then we are also aware that we need to generate the voter action that's needed really impact the electoral calculus here. And so for instance, the New York immigration coalition has worked with our member groups to register over quarter million immigrant citizens -- that's a big deal. In many of the elections, you know, the swing voter population is much smaller than the total number of immigrant citizen numbers.

And so immigrant voters are not only increasing in numbers, but we're better organized. Like I said last year in New York State we mobilized and reached out to 50,000 voters making over 150,000 voter contacts. We have more immigrants running for officer, whether it's City Council or other levels of government. We have more community leaders who are becoming active.

So I think we're really seeing kind of the mostly unified agenda and more mobilization power.

Ali Noorani: And then Javier, do you have any last comment? You have the last word.

Javier Valdes: No, I think, you know, Claudia, you know our organization very well. You've seen how we do our work. I think we in particular, you've seen the ability for us to get out the vote in the last election. So last year we got 76,000 people out to vote, which I think it shows the ability for us to not only work with the undocumented affected individuals, but also work with those that can actually go out and make a change.

But as Chung-Wha mentioned, I think everybody, regardless of your status, has an ability to create change in this country. And I think it's really important to highlight that.

And then the one thing that I have noticed in being in Queens, is that even though you might be undocumented -- most people know somebody that is a voter or citizen that can actually go out and vote. And they're able to connect, even if it's a family member or a friend to push them to make sure that they are going out to vote, and that this is an important critical issue.

And as you probably have seen in Queens, the immigrant turnout in the last City Council election was astronomical, was bigger than we ever expected. So I feel like we're on the right track.

Ali Noorani: Great. I want to thank Javier Valdes, with Make the Road, Chung-Wha Hong, with the New York Immigration Coalition, and Congressman Crowley with 7th District in New York.

If the press have further questions, they can call Shuya Ohno at the National Immigration Forum. His phone number is 202-309-5645. If you have further questions then we can connect you to either the Congressman, Javier, or Chung-Wha.

So again, I want to thank everybody for joining us today and we will talk to everybody very shortly. Thank you.

Operator: Ladies and gentlemen, that does conclude our conference for today. Again, thank you for your participation.

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