

The Con- versa- tion on Immi- grat- ion Refo- rm

Differing P- ositions on Provisions of Proposed Immigration Reform

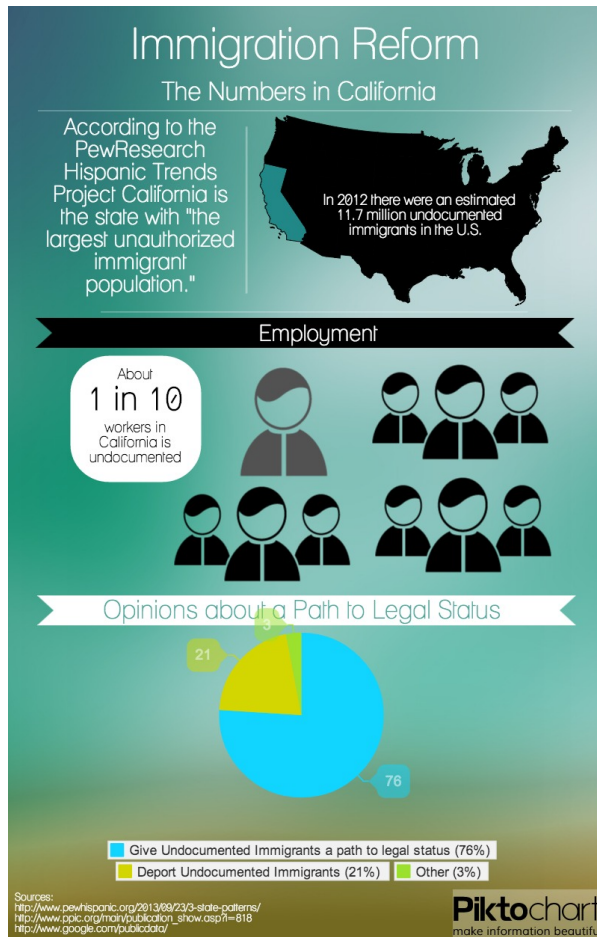


Labor organizer Al Rojas speaks at the panel “Northern California Braceros, Immigration, Labor & Human Rights” in San Francisco Calif., on Tuesday, July 30, 2013. (Photograph by: Natalie Rodriguez)

Veteran labor organizer Al Rojas continues to organize against the comprehensive immigration reform bill that is pending the House’s approval, despite Speaker [John Boehner’s declaration](#) that “we have no intention of ever going

to conference on the Senate bill," on November 13, 2013.

The issue of immigration is a nationwide concern that affects residents, citizens, documented and undocumented immigrants alike. With a population of 38 million in 2012, California is the state that had "the largest unauthorized immigrant population" with 2.45 million undocumented immigrants in the state that year, according to the [Pew Research Hispanic Trends Project](#). According to the [Public Policy Institute of California](#), 76% of Californians of both parties agree that undocumented immigrants should be granted a path to legal status. Advocates agree that it is time for the government to pass immigration reform to benefit the estimated 11.7 million undocumented immigrants in the nation. However, there is disagreement on the provisions of the reform bill that currently sits in the House.



Infographic by: Natalie Rodriguez

There are labor unions such as the [United Farm Workers](#) and the [American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations](#); Silicon Valley Technology leaders such as Mark Zuckerberg of Facebook; and organizations like *Voluntarios de la Comunidad* who support the proposed immigration reform. There are also labor unions such as the [International Longshore and Warehouse Union](#) and pro-immigration organizations such as the Alliance for the Rights of Immigrants, the United Front for Dignity and Justice, and 67 Sueños who do not fully support all of the stipulations of the S. 744 bill.

The Border Security, Economic Opportunity and Immigration Modernization Act, [S. 744](#), was

introduced in April of 2013 and passed the Senate in June of the same year. On Wednesday, October 2, 2013, despite the government shutdown, House Democrats introduced a comprehensive reform plan, which has yet to be voted on by the House.

The Guest Worker Program Provision

In August, Rojas was a panelist at the “Northern California Braceros, Immigration Labor and Human Rights” panel at the ILWU’s local 34 in San Francisco Calif.

As a panelist he particularly addressed the guest worker program provision of the S. 744 bill. Rojas calls the proposed immigration reform bill “the greatest attack against working people in this country,” arguing that “now they are gonna pit us one worker against the other.” Rojas worked side by side with the legendary organizer Cesar Chavez through the UFW union. He currently disagrees with the UFWs position in support of immigration reform.

Rojas considers the bill “inhumane” and “discriminatory.” He considers that the bill does not lead to a path to citizenship, but rather would allow for the exploitation of workers similar to the abuse that happened as a result of the WWII Bracero temporary worker program, which began in the 1940s and formerly ended in the 1960s.

Through [Facebook](#), Rojas has

released an extended list of demands and plans for action similar to those of [The United Front for Justice and Dignity](#). The major demands are a cease to the deportations through an executive order from President Obama and “deferred action for the 11 million undocumented immigrants in the United States of America.”

Labor Unions such as the ILWU oppose the proposed immigration reform bill on the grounds that it “imposes extremely long waiting periods on the path to citizenship and favors workers with higher education and profitability to corporations, as opposed to the undocumented workers such as janitors and farm workers who would greatly benefit from the protections granted by legalization.” This conflict was one of the reasons that caused the [ILWU to cut ties](#) from the AFL-CIO union in August. California has 2.5 of the 14.4 million union members in the United States. Unions such as the UFW and the AFL-CIO could not be reached for comment in regards to their positions on immigration reform.



Professor Alex Saragoza speaks on the topic of immigration reform at the University of California, Berkeley on Wednesday July 31, 2013. (Photograph by: Natalie Rodriguez)

In August 2013 Alex Saragoza, professor of Comparative Ethnic Studies, who is currently teaching a course on immigration at the University of California, Berkeley, spoke about the guest worker program provision as part of the proposed immigration reform. In Saragoza's opinion, the problem is not the importation of temporary or guest workers, but rather the enforcement of decent working conditions and the prevention of abuse towards the workers. In the following podcast Rojas and Saragoza's opinions and expertise are put into conversation.

In July 2013, the [Executive Office of the President](#) released a report titled "The Economic Benefits of Fixing Our Broken Immigration System." The report, claims that if passed, the bill would strengthen the overall economy, encourage job creation and growth in the country, decrease budget deficits, and strengthen social security among other things. According to the report, from 1996 to 2012 there has been a 13.4% increase in immigrant contributions to US entrepreneurship. Despite this immigrant contribution, out of the four US states that share a border with Mexico, Texas, New Mexico and Arizona, California had the highest unemployment rate at 8.9% in August of 2013 according to [Google Public Data](#) provided by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Bay Area Voices

Conversations on Immigration Reform in the Bay Area from Natalie Rodriguez on Vimeo.



Carlos Peláez Ochoa, a day laborer from Guatemala has picked up work at the same corner in Oakland, Calif., for twelve years. (Photograph by: Natalie Rodriguez)

Carlos Peláez Ochoa, a day laborer of more than 12 years in Oakland, Calif., says that after the attack on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, he noticed a decrease in work. Milli Atkinson, immigration attorney for the [Centro de Ayuda Legal para Inmigrantes](#) explains that after September 11, less temporary work visas were granted to foreign workers and it became more difficult to cross the border.

Labor Unions are not the only ones in the employment sector who are in support of immigration reform. In August of 2013, Facebook CEO, Mark [Zuckerberg](#) made a public call for immigration reform arguing that he is not only interested in securing H1B visas for high skilled workers, but also that undocumented students "are going to be tomorrow's entrepreneurs and people creating jobs in this

country.”

According to the [Silicon Valley Economic Development Alliance](#), the Silicon Valley, which consists of 40 cities south of the San Francisco Bay Area in California including the city of San Jose, “gave birth to the computer and information technology industries.” Today, it is the home of worldwide trending social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, and search engines such as Google and Yahoo. Silicon Valley has a work force of 1.2 million workers.

DREAMers

Months before Zuckerberg’s declarations in support of reform, in April of 2013 Zuckerberg along with other technology industry leaders such as Reid Hoffman, co-founder of LinkedIn and Drew Houston, founder and CEO of Dropbox, to name a few, launched the political advocacy group [FWD.us](#). The focus of the organization is currently immigration reform. Through their website, they claim to support a secure border, future workers, an employment verification program, a pathway to citizenship and reforming the legal system which they claim are “principles, which together compromise comprehensive immigration reform.”

On November 20, 2013 FWD.us in collaboration with LinkedIn hosted a [DREAMer Hackathon](#) at LinkedIn headquarters in Mountain View, Calif. For 24-hours, a select group of 20 Dreamers,

undocumented immigrant students, from across the country coded and created applications and games alongside technology industry leaders.

In an e-mail from Kendra Desler, NatyRockdriguez.com was informed that both the Hackathon and a Happy Hour hosted by FWD.us that took place in Oakland, Calif. were private events that were closed to the media. Founder and President Joe Green e-mailed a recap of the Hackathon with a link to an [interview that Zuckerberg](#) granted to the ABC network days after the event took place. Prizes were awarded to three different teams in the categories Best Advocacy, Best Design and Best Storytelling.



A replica of the 67 Sueños mural hangs on the wall of the office space in which the youth meet with their coordinator Pablo Paredes in San Francisco, Calif., on Tuesday, November 26, 2013. (Photograph by: Natalie Rodriguez)

In contrast to FWD.us' Dreamers, 67 Sueños, a project of [the American Friends Service Committee](#), has the mission of "[raising] the voices of students who are undocumented and let them know their rights." The goal in their mission statement is to "raise those/our underprivileged migrant youth voices to expand the debate and the legislative possibilities."

Yoxeli Romero Santos, a full time employee of the organization as a youth leader, says that while she believes that President Obama should be held accountable for his promises for reform, she does not support provisions such as an increase in border security and a temporary guest worker program. Her concern in implementing a guest worker program like that of Rojas is the safety and the treatment of workers. She also compares a contemporary guest worker program to the Bracero program during WWII. "When I just think of all of that, like the increase of more security and the military, I think of death," says Romero Santos who believes that there are already many dying in an attempt to cross the border.

Pro-reform Activists



Jose Sandoval and Lucinda Gutierrez of *Voluntarios de la Comunidad* at their 9th annual march for human rights in San Jose, Calif., on Sunday, December 1, 2013. (Photograph by: Natalie Rodriguez)

On Sunday, December 1, 2013, the organization *Voluntarios de la Comunidad* hosted their ninth annual walk for human rights in which they also called for an end to deportations and a push to pass the comprehensive immigration reform. One of the

speakers on the open microphone was Rafael Larraenza, director of the organization [Los Angeles del Desierto](#) or [The Desert Angels](#), a search and rescue group of volunteers who aid those who become lost in the desert areas between the U.S./Mexico border.

“We are very excited and hopeful that [the reform] will take place because the luck of our migrant brothers and sisters depends on it.” Larraenza says that “the situation is becoming more difficult,” and that “between 400 and 500 bodies” are removed from the desert yearly. He also believes that “any advance is important” and that “it is not fair to oppose what is barely taking place.”

Community Activist Jose Sandoval also believes that the proposed reform plan is better than no plan at all. He stresses that in a survey conducted by [Voluntarios de la Comunidad](#) a majority said that they would accept a temporary work permit. Their [website poll](#) results indicate the opposite, with 68.67% of the poll takers answering “No” to the question “Would you accept a Temporary permit, without citizenship.”

Moving Forward

While the fate of the nationwide reform for immigration sits in the House, California Governor Jerry Brown [tweeted](#) “While Washington waffles on immigration, California’s forging ahead” after he signed the AB 60 bill and the Trust Act into law. AB 60 will grant undocumented

immigrants licenses, which will allow them to legally drive in the state of California, while the Trust Act limits the collaboration of law enforcement with Immigration and Customs Enforcement. As the conversation among immigration advocates continues in favor and against the different provisions of a comprehensive immigration reform bill, the overall results of a reform would have a great impact on the state of California.



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