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We have second chance for a more pro-worker reform

By **CHRISTINE NEUMANN-ORTIZ**

Posted: June 16, 2007

The U.S. Senate's inability to move an immigration reform bill forward is a blow to our nation's identity and makes a mockery of our traditions as a nation of immigrants.

Though the Senate immigration bill represented a bipartisan effort to address the most pressing labor and civil rights issue of our time, it was seriously flawed in the areas of a realistic legalization program, a path to citizenship for guest workers, due process, family unification and militarization.

The legalization provisions - the bedrock of any immigration reform bill - would have required an immigrant head of household to leave the country for an undetermined amount of time and, when all fees are included, pay close to \$9,000 to adjust his or her status. One such woman said of the provisions, "I am the father and mother to my three children. Who will care for them if I am gone? Who will pay the rent and bills? Who has \$9,000 in their pocket? This is a trap."

The legislative process was derailed by a minority of extremist, anti-immigrant senators in a state of denial who did not come to the table to negotiate in good faith. We cannot allow our political leaders to feel that they are now justified in ignoring an issue that affects the lives of millions of working-class families.

The 2006 elections and the historic mass marches of 2006 and 2007 were a mandate to Congress and the president that they should provide a federal solution to our outdated and discriminatory immigration system. Numerous public opinion polls in May showed broad support among Americans for legalization. A New York Times/CBS News poll showed that differences are not great between Republicans and Democrats on this issue: 66% of Republicans polled favor legalization, as do 72% of Democrats and 65% of independents.

It is imperative that the president and representatives of both parties in Congress work to reintroduce a bill - as Senate leaders promised last week to do - that provides real comprehensive immigration reform.

The demise of the Senate bill provides an opportunity for a better bill that is fundamentally pro-worker and can address not just the needs of immigrant workers but also the need for fair trade, education and training opportunities for low-wage U.S. workers.

The immigrant rights movement will not be silent and will continue to organize to achieve the rights that immigrants deserve through their hard work and dignity as human beings.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and President Bush: Take a stand. Do not let history judge you as having failed to rise to the occasion.

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From the June 17, 2007 editions of the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel
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