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## Readers' Forum: Reasonable immigration reform

nancy mao | From the community

By Nancy Mao

Guest Commentary

Posted: 03/06/2010 12:01:00 AM PST

TOM BARNIDGE'S "Immigration reform would be their dream come true" commented on the recent immigration reform rally in Concord. In it, he highlighted a speaker in his 20s who "unwittingly provided fuel for (those against comprehensive immigration reform)." Like this columnist, I also attended this rally. What Barnidge omitted is that this speaker was brought to the U.S. as a child, graduated from high school, attends junior college locally, and works two jobs while assuming numerous family obligations.

His dream of transferring to Cal Poly SLO to earn a bachelor's degree is precluded by his undocumented status.

The DREAM Act portion of HR 4321 addresses undocumented persons such as this young man: brought to the U.S. as children before the age of 16 through no choice of their own; graduated from high school; completed two years of college, military service, or employment; and not subject to security and criminal bars.

Among this population of undocumented persons numbering in the millions, are young people who don't speak Spanish, and for whom Mexico is a foreign land.

They could be your classmate, co-worker, fellow military personnel, or even a family member by marriage. You would never know that they were "illegal" if they were brought here as young children years ago by their parents seeking a better life.

That Barnidge chooses to purposefully exclude such information and instead focus on

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that this young man is an uninsured motorist (his undocumented status prevents him from obtaining a drivers license and insurance), exposes a personal bias.

Anti-immigration sentiments are often rooted in unfounded bias, and anti-immigrant proponents commonly exploit the basic fears surrounding illegal immigration: criminal behavior and a decline in jobs for U.S. citizens.

However, sustained historical data reveals that immigrants are less likely to commit crimes. Further, California has the highest number of immigrants in the country, yet also has the nation's highest GDP with the world's eighth largest economy.

President Ronald Reagan's 1986 legalization program actually raised wages and increased tax revenue, consumerism and net economic benefit.

More people do not mean fewer jobs. Instead, more people mean a bigger economy.

The alternative to Comprehensive Immigration Reform is mass deportation of more than 10 million people.

The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimated that the 2005 bipartisan McCain-Kennedy immigration reform would have generated \$66 billion in new revenue during 2007-2016 through new income, payroll taxes and other administrative fees.

In contrast, the cost to deport 10 million unauthorized immigrants would cost \$206 billion over five years.

Immigration is a complex issue that is far too easy to approach flippantly. Instead of relying on our base fears and biases, let's strive to understand the facts and net benefits of legalization.

Only then can we intelligently reform our broken immigration system; HR 4321 is the first step.

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Return to Top