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Missouri coalition standing up for immigrant rights

By Tony Pecinovsky

“It’s not enough not to do bad things. We have to do things that welcome immigrants to our state,” Vanessa Crawford, executive director, Missouri Immigrant and Refugee Advocates (MIRA) coalition, told members and activists from all over Missouri as they prepared to lobby the legislature here on March 6 for immigrant rights.

The Missouri legislature, which is currently dominated by right-wing republicans, is debating a number of anti-immigrant bills in the House and Senate, including legislation Crawford calls “un-constitutional.”

For example, MIRA opposes HB 275, which would require every employer in Missouri to enroll in the federal E-verify program.

According to the coalition, mandated E-verify is not-only counter-productive, it is cost prohibitive; costing the average Missouri employer \$73 per-employee and the average small business employer an estimated \$147 per-employee. Additionally, the coalition argues that E-verify is also often inaccurate; particularly affected are women who have changed their names due to marriage or divorce, and documented, work-authorized foreign born individuals.

“Often people just won’t hire immigrants, documented or otherwise,” Crawford said, “just to avoid the confusion and cost that E-verify would



cause.”

This bill, if passed into law, would also “put employers in jail even if they unknowingly hire an undocumented immigrant.”

The coalition also opposes HB 575 and SB 267; these two bills would invalidate laws and contracts originating in other countries, potentially damaging marriage, divorce, child custody arrangements, and other matters based on religious and foreign law.

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According to Crawford, these bills are “unnecessary and harmful, and create an environment of fear and mistrust.”

Missouri is currently home to about 230,000 immigrants and refugees, 43 percent of whom are eligible to vote. Immigrants in Missouri gener-

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ate over \$652 million in taxes and are 60 percent more likely to start their own businesses than non-immigrants. Furthermore, it is estimated that undocumented immigrants pay more than \$155 million in taxes here.

Simply put, laws that encourage immigration and welcome immigrants to the show-me-state are good for our economy, job growth and the creation of small business.

MIRA is also working on pro-immigrant bills that they hope will generate awareness about the positive economic contributions immigrants make to Missouri, and to our nation.

The first, SB 203, would repeal an anti-immigrant law passed in 2008 prohibiting undocumented immigrants from enrolling in state colleges and universities, and denying bail to immigrants 'suspected' of being undocumented. The impact of this law has fostered fear and mistrust between the immigrant community and police.

The second bill, SB 209, would grant in-state tuition to immigrants, allowing immigrant students who graduate from a Missouri high school to pay in-state college tuition.

According to the coalition, these students like their peers, reside-in and pay taxes to the state of Missouri, and deserve equal treatment and access to higher education.

"Politicians need to stop using anti-immigrant rhetoric for political reasons," Crawford added.

Nationally, a debate is raging about the future of immigration reform. Many, even some republicans acknowledge that the current immigration system is broken, and needs a complete overhaul.

As the results of the November elections demonstrated, immigrants are playing an increasingly important role in local and national politics.

In fact, according to a recent poll, Hispanic voters - the largest and fastest growing immigrant group - now consider immigration reform the top issue facing Congress and the president; 58 percent of Latino voters view immigration reform as the most important issue, while 38, 19, and 15 percent view job creation, health care and education respectfully as the most important issue.



Tony Pecinovsky writes for Peoplesworld.org.

A fresh revitalized labor movement

By PW Editorial Board

The AFL-CIO will probe new ways of organizing itself and the broader labor movement and its allies to meet what it says are the changing times. The federation's president made the first public announcement of this intention here in Chicago yesterday, just a week after leaders of the nation's unions discussed the idea at an executive council meeting of the AFL-CIO in Orlando, Fla.

Trumka said at that time that when the giant labor federation was first formed "it was very much about us protecting ourselves from each other. The new economy and the attacks on labor and its allies require very new thinking."

Trumka spoke publically about the plan in Chicago recently just prior to a mass rally at which Chicago unions launched what is, for labor, an unprecedented push for immigration law reform. The Chicago rally is the first of many immigration reform rallies labor is planning in the weeks ahead. Trumka made his organizing remarks at a University of Illinois gathering just

prior to the rally. The meeting at the college was titled "Conference on New Models for Worker Representation."

A major aim said would be to bring together traditional unions with worker centers and other non-traditional types of organizations workers are forming now all over the country. Examples of these are found among domestic workers, taxi cab drivers, carwash workers, immigrant workers, both skilled and unskilled, and others. The AFL-CIO already has affiliate relationships with groups in these categories.

"To be blunt, our basic system of workplace representation is failing to meet the needs of America's workers by every critical measure. The numbers give us all the proof we need," he said. Recent reports show just over 11 percent of American workers in unions. The reorganization promises to be the biggest thing that's happened in the trade union movement since the transition from craft to industrial unionism. It deserves every support.

The reorganization promises to be the biggest thing that's happened in the trade union movement since the 1930s.

Leaders highlight strategies for African American community

By Marilyn Bechtel

Aw ho's who of leaders in the African American community came together at Laney Community College Feb. 23 for a symposium, "Making Connections: Strategies and Outcomes for our Black Community," including public safety, Black health and wellness, job creation and workforce development, intergenerational relations and more.

The opening plenary, "A Look into the Black Community: Where we have been, where we are, where we are going," featured a keynote by U.S. Representative Barbara Lee, D-Calif.

"We must never forget the revolutionary movement of the Black Panther Party which really set the stage for institutional and structural change," Lee told the audience. Lee, who worked with the BPP in the early to mid-1970s - pointed out that among now-broadly accepted Panther initiatives, many now with government funding, are free breakfast programs for children, community health clinics, voter registration and voter empowerment programs.

As a Budget Committee member and the only African American woman on the House Appropriations Committee, Lee said, she deals constantly with issues of funding priorities. "Are we going to continue to fund building prisons, or building schools? Will we fight to build houses and create jobs, or continue to build bombs and missiles? We have to re-engage in our movement for peace and for justice."



Board member Greg Hodge, and Jakada Imani, executive director of the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights emphasized the urgency of stepped-up fight-back against racism today, including the "new Jim Crow" of the prison-industrial complex.

A panel on public safety bringing together civil rights attorney John Burris and Oakland Police Chief Howard Jordan with pastors Michael McBride and Zach Carey and community representative Robin Bonner emphasized the importance of early childhood and primary school education and development of a social safety net in crime prevention. Seeing crime as a public health and mental health issue opens paths for prevention, panelists and audience members said, while restorative justice makes it possible to cope with nonviolent negative behavior without involving the judicial system.

The symposium, sponsored by Alameda County Supervisor Keith Carson, marked the second African American Organizations Making Connections program. The first took place in 2010.

Seeing crime as a public health and mental health issue opens paths for prevention.

Las Vegas cab company forces a strike

By Mark Gruenberg

The second largest cab company in Las Vegas has forced its drivers - the first taxi drivers to unionize, more than a decade ago - to strike.

Drivers for Yellow Checker Star Transportation (YCS) had to walk out on March 3 after the firm refused to give their union, Office and Professional Employees Local 4873, information it needed to bargain a new contract. Refusal breaks labor law. The local has more than 1,200 members among the 1,703 YCS drivers.

The firm then unilaterally imposed its last contract offer on the drivers, local President Dennis Arrington said. "Together, we have a refusal to provide relevant information and an imposed contract," he added. "The drivers were left with no choice but to move forward with the strike." The local taxi commission apparently sided with YCS, by authorizing other firms to put more cabs on the road at any one time.

The Las Vegas taxi drivers were the first drivers to unionize, more than a decade ago. The AFL-CIO has recently concentrated on aiding bottom-up organizing drives initiated by taxi drivers, domestic workers and other exploited groups, sending organizing aid, money, and charters to groups such as the Taxi Workers Alliance.

Pobres recibieron de petróleo de Venezuela

Por Granma

Cerca de dos millones de personas en Estados Unidos recibieron calefacción gratis, gracias al liderazgo del presidente (Hugo) Chávez", expresó Joseph P. Kennedy II, fundador de la organización sin fines de lucro Citizens Energy Corporation (Corporación de Energía para los Ciudadanos), que se encarga de suministrar energía a la población pobre de esa nación.

En 2005, Petróleos de Venezuela (PDVSA), a través de su filial Citgo, inició un programa de suministro gratuito de combustible para calefacción, que permite beneficiar a las familias estadounidenses que no disponen de recursos económicos suficientes para contar con este servicio durante el invierno.

Este plan atiende a habitantes de 25 estados de la nación norteamericana, e incluye a miembros de más de 240 comunidades indígenas y alcanza a más de 200 refugios para indigentes.

"El presidente Chávez se preocupó mucho por los pobres de Venezuela y de todas las naciones del mundo y sus necesidades, incluso las necesidades más básicas, mientras que algunas de las personas más ricas del planeta tienen más dinero del que nunca razonablemente pueden gastar", indicó Kennedy, tal como refiere una nota publicada en el portal de la Radio del Sur.

A través de un comunicado, el sobrino del expresidente John F. Kennedy y quien integró la Cámara de Representantes, lamentó el fallecimiento del líder de la Revolución Bolivariana y envió sus condolencias a los venezolanos.

"Nuestras oraciones acompañan a la familia del presidente Chávez, al pueblo de Venezuela, y a todos los que, gracias a su generosidad, pudieron tener calefacción", dijo.

Por su parte, el congresista demócrata José Serrano, quien gestionó la solicitud de la donación ante Citgo, expresó que el Jefe de Estado venezolano fue un "verdadero revolucionario latinoamericano" y manifestó sentirse orgulloso de poder decir que su barrio (Bronx de Nueva York) se ha beneficiado del programa venezolano, con "millones invertidos en nuestra comunidad".

Para Serrano, el legado de Chávez, tanto en Estados Unidos como en todo el hemisferio, "quedará asegurado en la gente a la que inspiró para luchar por una vida mejor para los pobres y oprimidos".

El 1º de febrero pasado comenzó la octava edición de programa de calefacción Venezuela-Citgo, para atender a 100.000 familias este año.

El presidente de Citgo, Alejandro Granado, recordó que tras el alza de los precios del combustible para calefacción que se produjo en 2005, como resultado de los huracanes Katrina y Rita, se dio inicio a este plan, que ha significado la donación de más de 200 millones de galones de combustible.

"Este programa se ha convertido en uno de los esfuerzos de asistencia energética más importantes de Estados Unidos. Este año, mientras las familias a lo largo de la Costa Este luchan por recuperarse de las pérdidas causadas por el huracán Sandy, esta donación adquiere aún más importancia", expresó.

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