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Could the DREAM Act have saved Joaquin Luna's life?

By Pepe Lozano

The recent passage of anti-immigrant state laws on top of the constant immigration hate rhetoric in the news and across the airwaves were just too much for Joaquin Luna to bear. The hope that immigration reform would pass in Washington never happened. He could have benefited from the DREAM Act, but it failed to pass. It was all too disappointing and he had enough. He could no longer stomach a life that constantly judged him by his undocumented status rather than his character. The tremendous barriers limiting his educational opportunities, career path and dreams had taken a heavy toll on him.

The emotional burden peaked for Luna on Nov. 25, the day after Thanksgiving. Luna put on his best suit, white shirt and black tie. He kissed his family members for the last time. He went into the bathroom with a handgun and took his own life. He was only 18.

Luna was a senior at Juarez Lincoln High School in Mission, Texas, where he lived. He came to the U.S. from Mexico with his parents and five siblings when he was six years old. He spoke fluent English and was an excellent student. He dreamed of going to college and becoming an engineer. The U.S. was the only place he considered home.

Over the years Luna became distressed with heated immigration debate taking place across the



country. He grew more and more anxious about his legal status. He couldn't stand questions on college and job applications asking him about his citizenship or for a Social Security number he didn't have. He would frequently talk about it with friends and family, saying even if he graduated from college the chances of a good job afterwards were limited. He grew increasingly frustrated.

His family said Luna followed politics closely, reading newspapers about the harsh anti-immigrant laws passed in Alabama and Arizona.

"He got angry," said his older brother Carlos Mendoza to The Guardian. "He said the people passing these laws had no heart: 'How could they

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leave so many kids without parents and destroy so many lives?"

The day after Luna took his own life, his family received his acceptance letter to the University of Texas-Pan American.

Mendoza said his younger brother was very let down after the DREAM Act failed to pass in Congress.

Mendoza said his younger brother called him to wish him well and say goodbye shortly before he took his own life. In his last words to his brother, Luna said he couldn't accomplish his dreams because there was a huge wall blocking him from fulfilling his goals.

Becky Moeller, the Texas AFL-CIO president, said Luna's suicide highlights the human toll of the DREAM Act's failure to pass.

"Joaquin's suicide is a grave tragedy for his family and community, Texas, and the future of our nation," she said in a statement.

On Saturday, the day after Luna took his own life, his family received his acceptance letter to the University of Texas-Pan American.

The family is urging youth experiencing similar trauma to Luna's to stay strong, seek support and not give up by taking your own life.

Meanwhile, the 2012 presidential election has put a spotlight on immigration and the DREAM Act, with even some Republican candidates saying they support it.

Mitt Romney, another GOP presidential can-

didate agreed with Gingrich saying he "would staple a green card to the diploma of anybody who's got a degree of math, science, master's degree, Ph.D. We want those brains in our country."

Texas Gov. Rick Perry, a GOP presidential candidate, supports the Texas Dream Act, which gives in-state tuition to some students who have entered the country illegally. Perry has said his goal is to make sure immigrants become contributing members of society.

However many GOP lawmakers in Congress say passing the federal DREAM Act is "blanket amnesty" and strongly oppose it. Sen. John Cornyn, R-Tex., calls it "a band-aid and maybe worse, it would provide an incentive for future illegal immigration."

Rep. Michelle Bachman, R-Minn., denounces the DREAM Act saying it would "offer taxpayer-subsidized benefits to illegal aliens."

With the Republican controlled Congress stalled and unable to compromise on a bill to reduce the budget, and the presidential elections around the corner, the chances of any immigration legislation being passed soon seems unlikely.



Pepe Lozano writes for the People's World.

Stop bill allowing indefinite detention

By PW Editorial Board

The U.S. Senate approved wording in the National Defense Authorization Bill, which should anger all Americans.

The obnoxious language, attached to the defense bill, would mandate that persons, including U.S. citizens arrested within the United States, accused of terrorism be subjected to detention without trial, in fact without a shadow of due process.

We call for the removal of this wording, and for President Obama to honor his threat to veto it if it is still in the bill after the House-Senate Conference Committee meetings.

On Tuesday, the Senate voted on an amendment presented by Senator Mark Udall (D-Colorado) to strip this provision from the bill. However, the amendment was rejected by a vote of 60 to 30. Sixteen Democrats voted against the amendment, though one, Senator Bob Menendez of New Jersey, subsequently asked that his vote be changed to favoring the Udall amendment. Assuming the overall bill passes the Senate, the next step is for a Conference Committee to reconcile the Senate language with a House version passed in May,

which did not include this obnoxious addition.

The assault on the constitutional right to due process, and also on the ancient right of habeas corpus, is blatant. A gung-ho supporter of this draconian measure, Republican Senator Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, made it clear that this is the intention, when he stated that people in the U.S. accused of terrorism should not be read their Miranda rights nor allowed legal representation. To pass such legislation will provide the means whereby future governments persecute political opposition with a threat of permanent imprisonment without trial on the basis of a specious claim of "involvement with terrorism".

The bill also includes language continuing the authorization of the administration to use force in Afghanistan and Iraq. It endorses the whole fallacious "war on terrorism" idea. And of course, the whole thing is an obscene waste of human and material resources.

We call everyone to contact their representatives to reject this, and on the Obama administration to veto this bill if it passes out of the Conference Committee with this language intact.

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Jobless rate drops to 8.6% because 315,000 drop out altogether

By John Wojcik

The nation's unemployment rate in November dropped to 8.6 percent, down from October's 9 percent. The unemployment figures released today by the U.S. Bureau of Labor statistics, the lowest since March 2009, were the result of 315,000 workers dropping out of the labor force. When the government calculates the jobless rate it counts only people who are actively seeking work.

The government said the economy added 120,000 jobs last month, less than the 150,000 economists say are needed each month just to keep up with the growth of the workforce.

"At this rate of job growth, it will be more than 20 years before we get back down to the unemployment levels we had before this recession," said Heidi Shierholz, an economist at the Economic Policy Institute. "A shrinking workforce is not the way we want to see unemployment drop," she declared.

Fourteen million workers remain officially unemployed, but some 26 million are actually unemployed, underemployed or have stopped looking for work.

The numbers of the long term jobless continue to rise. Defined as those who have been out of work for more than 27 weeks, they totaled 5.7 million, an enormous 43 percent of the total number of unemployed.

To make matters worse, unemployment insurance coverage for the long-term unemployed is set to expire Dec. 31. During January alone, 2 million desperate job seekers will be cut off from their lifelines if Congress does not approve an extension of emergency federal benefits. Over 6 million would lose those lifelines during the remainder of 2012.

The report from the government came at the end of a week during which Republicans in Congress put forward their so-called jobs plan, a



collection of bills that restricts union organizing rights, slashes government programs designed to guarantee the health and safety of both workers and the public, along with measures that would weaken or eliminate environmental protection.

200 jobless workers let the GOP know what they thought about its jobs plan as they flooded the halls of Congress with 75,000 petitions demanding that Congress act now to extend unemployment benefits and create jobs. They then rallied to kick off a weeklong series of actions that will see tens of thousands of jobless people descend on the nation's capital.

Plans are underway for unemployed people from every state in the union to move into tents set up in view of the Capitol. On Dec. 8, say unions and community groups, there will be a huge rally of the unemployed, joined by tens of thousands of working union members, community activists, religious leaders and others.

While the official jobless rate for white workers was 7.6 percent, for African-Americans it was 15.5 percent, for Latinos it was 11.4 percent and for teenagers it was 23.7 percent.

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NYC Opera contract in crisis

By Marilyn Bechtel

New York City Opera, one of the city's cultural treasures, stood at a crossroads this week, after contract talks broke down Nov. 30 between management and its two main unions.

The American Federation of Musicians, Local 802, and the American Guild of Musical Artists said opera management had unlawfully declared an impasse in the talks, despite the unions' intensive efforts to reach an agreement, including their readiness to make "extraordinary" concessions.

The two unions represent orchestra and chorus members, as well as directors, stage managers and principal singers who come in for specific performances.

In recent years financial pressures have forced City Opera to cut its season of performances drastically, from a one-time high of 12 to 16 operas a year with 130 performances, to a curtailed schedule of 16 performances.

The unions said the talks have focused on General Manager George Steel's plan to replace the 68-year-old professional company with ad-hoc freelance musicians and performers. They said this would eliminate dozens of jobs and would cut annual pay of the remaining instrumentalists and singers from about \$40,000 a year to \$4,000 while leaving Steel's pay at \$400,000, far outstripping the orchestra's total payroll.

They also sharply criticized what they called Steel's "poor management decisions," including his decision to leave the opera's traditional home at Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts for performances at various New York City venues.

Local 802 President Tino Gagliardi called management's proposals "a matter of paucity of vision. Steel talks about how the opera is broke, but doesn't understand that playing to large Lincoln Center audiences is the fastest way out of the fiscal crisis caused by his incompetent management."

Portugal cerrado por huelga general

Por Emile Schepers

Una huelga general convocada por los sindicatos laborales portugueses contra medidas de austeridad impuestas por el capital financiero internacional dejó cerrado a Portugal el jueves pasado.

La huelga del 24 de noviembre fue convocada por la mayor federación sindical portuguesa, la Confederación General de Trabajadores Portugueses (CGTP-IN), grupo que está cerca del Partido Comunista Portugués. Fue apoyado por la Unión General de Trabajadores (UGT), afiliada con los socialistas, y por muchas otras organizaciones cívicas y laborales. Resultó especialmente efectivo en parar el sistema de transporte y cerrar las oficinas gubernamentales, pero también extendió a la industria básica y otras áreas de la economía.

La huelga fue una respuesta a los esfuerzos constantes orquestados por el gobierno derechista del Primer Ministro Pedro Passos Coelho para intensificar las medidas de austeridad que han sido impuestas a Portugal por el Banco Central Europeo, la Comisión Europea y el Fondo Monetario Internacional en cambio por extensiones adicionales de crédito a este sufrido país.

Llegan las medidas tras privatizaciones, despedidas y recortes a salarios y pensiones, acciones ya impuestos por José Sócrates, antecedente de Passos Coelho como primer ministro, cuyo Partido Socialista sufrió una dura derrota a manos de los conservadores en las elecciones de junio de 2011 gracias al repudio popular a las medidas. Las nuevas medidas de austeridad tienen un efecto especial en estos momentos porque incluyen a un impuesto de 50 por ciento a los

aguinaldos navideños tradicionales a los trabajadores portugueses. Y esto viene por encima de una situación ya desesperada con un 12,4 por ciento de desempleo y el peso de una deuda nacional del 100 por ciento del producto nacional bruto.

Portugal forma parte de un grupo de países calificados como los PIIGS [cerdos, en inglés]: Portugal, Italia, Irlanda, Grecia y España [Spain, en inglés], países que están experimentando graves problemas provocados por la crisis mundial financiera y económica. Irlanda, Portugal y Grecia, con 4, 10 y 11 millones de habitantes respectivamente, son economías suficientemente grandes como que la posibilidad de su fallo de miedo a toda la Unión Europea y la zona del Euro.

El capital financiero internacional, los bancos europeos y los gobiernos de los más ricos países europeos han estado exigiendo la acción para reducir déficits como condición para más ayuda. Han respondido los gobiernos de los PIIGS con recortar sus sistemas de bienestar social, descansarles a millones de trabajadores, recortar salarios y pensiones, privatizar empresas estatales y destripar protecciones laborales.

La izquierda comunista y aliados en cada país, junta con las principales organizaciones laborales y cívicas han reaccionado a esto con protestas masivas y huelgas. Hay manifestaciones casi continuas en Grecia, en donde el gobierno del Partido Socialista Panhelénico del ex primer ministro George Papandreou ha sido reemplazado, bajo presión de acreedores internacionales, por una coalición tripartidaria que incluye a PASOK, el Partido Neodemócrata, y el Rally Popular Ortodoxo.