

Immigration Reform is Doable, A Key Symbol of Change, Say Religious, Labor, Latino, and Immigrant Advocacy Leaders

Key leaders who will be pushing the new Administration and Congress to enact immigration reform expressed optimism that broad reforms thwarted in recent years in Congress can and will be passed this year. Speaking on a conference call for reporters organized by the National Immigration Forum, a non-partisan pro-immigrant advocacy organization in Washington, the speakers, representing a diverse spectrum of constituencies engaged in immigration reform efforts, said comprehensive immigration reform remains an important priority for the country and that they were encouraged by early indications coming from the President-elect and Congressional leadership that reform was achievable.

The speakers included Cardinal Roger M. Mahony, the Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, who has been an outspoken advocate for immigration reform that includes legal status for undocumented immigrants who meet certain criteria and a critic of immigration raids which split up families. He was joined by John Wilhelm, President/ Hospitality Industry, UNITE HERE!, a union that has lead others in labor in supporting immigration reform and which represents garment workers, hotel and restaurant employees, and other workers in heavily immigrant industries. Latino civil rights leader Janet Murguía, President and CEO of the National Council of La Raza, a leading Latino civil rights organization, also spoke; as did long-time pro-immigrant leader Frank Sharry, Executive Director of America's Voice, an advocacy organization supporting comprehensive immigration reform. The call was moderated by Ali Noorani, Executive Director of the National Immigration Forum www.immigrationforum.org.

"Our current immigration policies-intermittent worksite raids, local law enforcement involvement, and a wall along our southern border, among other enforcement actions---have lead to the separation of immigrant families, an increase in fear and mistrust of law enforcement in immigrant communities, and discord and violence along our southern border," said Cardinal Mahony.

"As a nation, we cannot have it both ways," he continued. "We cannot accept the toil and taxes of immigrants while relegating them to a permanent underclass subject to abuse and exploitation. The issue of

immigration is an economic and social issue, for sure, but ultimately is a humanitarian one and should be viewed through that lens."

"The American people have embraced the proposition that has always been true about our country: that we will succeed as a nation if we put our divisions aside and work together," said John Wilhelm, President Hospitality Industry, UNITE HERE! "As we work to rebuild this country, it is important that all workers and all employers are on an even playing field. We will not fix this country if we are not all in this together."

"The face of America has always had immigrant features and the way we treat immigrants and approach their integration into U.S. society holds important implications for the future progress of the country," said Janet Murguía, President and CEO of the National Council of La Raza, a Latino civil rights organization. "Reform it not only possible, we as a nation are ready to do it."

"The nation's dysfunctional immigration system is a symbol of how our leaders have failed to tackle and solve tough problems," said Frank Sharry, executive director of America's Voice. "We are hopeful and confident that this year immigration reform will become a symbol of a new commitment to delivering on the promise of change."

"Senator John McCain (R-AZ) is reportedly already talking to his caucus about immigration reform. Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) included an immigration bill as one of his first ten bills; a traditional sign from Senate leadership that it sees the issue as a top priority," said Ali Noorani, Executive Director of the National Immigration Forum. "Immigration is shaping up as an issue on which the new President and the new Congress can come to agreement in a bipartisan manner and actually accomplish something."