

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Why Americans should support immigration reform

BY JEFF BORG

WHY SHOULD CIVIL LIBERTARIANS in Florida care about immigrants? First, because all persons, not just citizens, deserve due process, and they are not getting it.

In South Florida, five Sri Lankan asylum seekers recently languished in federal custody without bond for more than three years. In Massachusetts, a federal judge just granted class-action status to

detainees held there without bond hearings for six months. The average stay for an immigrant in federal custody is a month.

More important, we should care about immigrants because they are so many of our most energetic, creative, productive, intelligent, indefatigable coworkers, friends, and family members. They have to be.

Before she died, my Armenian grandmother recounted the harrowing story of her escape from central Turkey during the pogroms of the 1910s. The unlikely adventure sounded just like the plot of a spy movie.

BUT DESPITE MY GROWING UP in Dade County during the 1970s, when Cuban refugees were transforming this place into the capital of Latin America, I never knew anyone with immigration issues. Not until young Jose Mendoza, from South America, stumbled into my circle of friends in 1999. I learned about immigration — and perseverance — from him.

Cuban nationals merely have to touch dry land to get status. Canadians and Bermudans need only their passports to enter. A visa-waiver program welcomes visitors from another 37 countries — 81 percent of them in Europe. None is in Africa, South America, Central America, or the Caribbean. For Mendoza, just to wrangle a tourist visa was huge.

As a kid, his legs were weak, so he worked extra hard to become the leading ballet dancer of his country. After a drunk driver killed his friends, smashed his knees, and ended his career in dance, Mendoza launched a new career in medical research. When he arrived in Miami and his hosts abandoned him, he scrambled to make new friends.

Immigrant Jose Mendoza contributed countless hours of volunteer time and thousands of dollars in fees before his naturalization ceremony, seen here.



Mendoza filled his days here volunteering with several charities. After living through Hurricane Charley, he volunteered with the Red Cross in Punta Gorda. After witnessing the World Trade Center collapse, he reported for Red Cross duty at Ground Zero. He mastered English and learned about civil liberties.

But back home, when thugs and police robbed and beat him once too many times just for being gay, Mendoza gathered up his evidence, applied for political asylum in Miami, received it in record time, and the next day landed his dream job, researching HIV vaccines.

In Washington, he ran malaria vaccine trials for the U.S. Navy, served on a panel of the Food and Drug Administration, and partnered with Colon Cancer Alliance to launch a new Hispanic outreach operation, including fund-raising. Now in Los Angeles, Dr. Mendoza runs all clinical operations for a leading pharmaceutical research firm.

Two years ago, Jose Mendoza finally got to raise his hand in the stately federal courthouse on Constitution Avenue across from the Capitol, swear allegiance to the United States, and become one of us. From asylum to citizenship, he spent seven years and \$47,000, which he earned himself, on lawyers, applications, and documentation. We are a better society because he was strong enough, smart enough, and lucky enough to ply our byzantine immigration system.

Maria Rodriguez, an ACLU member who has received the chapter's Rodney Thaxton Racial Justice Award, is executive director of the Florida Immigrant Coalition. Last November, the group hosted the National Immigrant Integration Conference here in Miami.

Advocates came from around the

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country to network with fellow educators, students, publishers, authors, philanthropists, legislators, executives, bureaucrats, lawyers, organizers, labor leaders, religious people, and policy wonks. They worked on developing human capital and citizenship, expanding rights and freedoms, and receiving new members into our communities.

On immigration reform, U.S. Chamber of Commerce President Thomas J. Donohue stated recently, "It will add jobs, talent, innovation, investment, and dynamism to our economy."

Reform now languishes in the House of Representatives, where a recalcitrant

Tea Party threatens Republican members with primary fights if they vote for it. Civil libertarians should support reform and be sure their congresspeople know it.

In Miami-Dade, our ACLU chapter helped convince the county to withdraw from the federal ICE-detainer program, which misuses local resources to round up undocumented coworkers, friends, and family members. We plan more activities to support the rights of immigrants. So call, write, come, help.



According to the White House:

BUSINESS. Immigrants are 30 percent more likely to launch a business. They started 25 percent of U.S. public companies backed by venture capital, including Google, eBay, Yahoo!, and Intel.

JOBS. Immigration reform could support and create up to 900,000 new jobs in three years. Immigrants are 33 percent of our engineers; comprise 27 percent of our mathematicians, statisticians, and computer scientists; and account for 24 percent of our physical scientists.

GDP. If passed, reform would increase gross domestic product by at least 0.8 to 1.3 percent from 2012 to 2016.

REACHING OUT

Did you know Tobias Simon?

BY DINA WEINSTEIN

I AM A MIAMI-BASED journalist researching Tobias Simon (1930–1982) for a number of articles on the 50th anniversary of the 1964 civil rights demonstrations in St. Augustine, Florida, that were key to passing the federal Civil Rights Act.

Simon was a Miami-based lawyer who specialized in civil rights cases, representing those in need. He represented Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., when he was jailed in St. Augustine, as well as hundreds of protesters. Born in Montreal and educated at Harvard Law School, Simon personally led Florida opposition to the death penalty in the 1960s and 1970s. Since his death, the Florida Bar has annually recognized a private lawyer for voluntary, free legal services to the poor with an award in Simon's name.

I am eager to connect with people who knew Simon. I would be very grateful to hear from people who were a part of the Lawyers' Constitutional Defense Committee (LCDC), which handled important civil rights cases during the 1960s. Please get in touch with me at 786.246.0644 or coralgablesdina@gmail.com.

ELECTIONS

Greater Miami Chapter elects board members, officers for 2014

ELECTIONS FOR THE GREATER MIAMI Chapter's officers and board of directors took place at the chapter's annual meeting on December 3, 2013. An installation brunch was held at the home of board member Benjamin Waxman on January 19, 2014.

DIRECTORS. The following were elected for a two-year term on the board of directors: Joseph F. Bessard, Ronald Bilbao, Jeff Borg, Omar Contreras, Mariano Cruz, Julia Dawson, Charles Fischer, Nicole Foster, Linda M. Horkitz, Max Lesnick, Rigo Lozano, Joseph E. Nascimento, Jean Newland, Israel Sands, Mauro C. Santos, Carlene Sawyer, Dante Trevisani, and Lorna Veraldi.

OFFICERS. At the annual meeting, members of the board who were present and voting elected officers for a one-year term. Jeff Borg is serving as president again. Jeffrey Hearne is first vice president and Manning Salazar is second vice president. Lorna Veraldi



Chapter board members meet over dinner each month at Soyka.

and Christopher Brochyus will handle the treasurer's and secretary's jobs, respectively, for another term.

Borg appointed two additional board members for one-year terms: Ellis Berger and Emily Graham. They filled slots that were vacant for the remaining year of the board's 2012–14 term.

Benjamin Waxman chaired the Nominating Committee and Linda M. Horkitz served as vice chair. Members of the committee were Ronald Bilbao, Helen McEachrane, Lorna Veraldi, and Jeffrey Hearne, first vice president, as an ex-officio member.