



Editorial: The American Dream is as alluring as ever

March 21, 2016

Sometimes it helps to put a face on an issue that has the potential to divide us, the face of a person who understands that issue from the inside having lived with it, often for years.

That was the idea over the weekend at Town of Chester Senior Center where the Orange County Democratic Women put on a program entitled, “The Death of the American Dream.”

In a way, the title was misleading. The woman who was the center of attention, the person who put a face on the issue of immigration, had in many ways followed the lure of that dream and has in some ways achieved it.

Argelia Morales, brought from Mexico to the United States at age 5 by her mother, has a college degree, a master’s degree, a job. That’s the dream fulfilled in the traditional way, through hard work including three jobs to pay college because she could not apply for financial aid.

While she has some protection from deportation under the federal Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, she needs to apply regularly to stay in this country and that program does not provide a path toward fulfilling the real dream — citizenship.

Her message stands in stark contrast to the tone of the presidential campaign this year, a race on the Republican side to see who can build the biggest wall on the Mexican border, who can promise to deport the most undocumented immigrants the fastest.

As another speaker on Sunday noted, for all of the angry rhetoric in the campaign, the Obama administration has not been all that friendly to immigrants. Justin Mazzola, a human rights lawyer and researcher with Amnesty International, said the U.S. immigration system is “rigged towards deportation.”

Those who might be inclined to give Morales the benefit of the doubt, to acknowledge that her achievements are impressive, also could dismiss the session Sunday as misleading, a focus on an individual who is not representative of the larger issue.

The real problem, the one we hear about so often in campaign appearances, is the criminal nature of so many who cross our borders illegally. We need to keep them out and throw them out for our own protection.

And while there are individual stories that fuel that narrative, those who study crime and immigration find that immigrants, illegal and otherwise, are less inclined to criminal activity. One survey of such studies reported that “increased immigration does not increase crime and sometimes even causes crime rates to fall.” And that came not from the left but from the far right, from the CATO Institute, a conservative think tank.

Jobs? “The conventional wisdom says illegal immigrants take American jobs and lower American wages. That conventional wisdom is wrong.” That comes not from a liberal publication but from from Forbes, the conservative magazine.

Not that long ago, many who called themselves conservatives, including Marco Rubio, understood the benefits of an immigration policy that would offer a path to citizenship for the millions who were hoping to chase the American Dream, the dream that still eludes Argelia Morales and many others who have proven they deserve the chance.