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Guest columnist

U.S. can't afford to wait on immigration reform

Congress must introduce a comprehensive immigration-reform bill by May 1, writes guest columnist Pramila Jayapal. "We can't afford to wait," she says.

By **Pramila Jayapal**
Special to The Times

AMERICA can't afford to wait.

We can't afford to wait for fair and just reform to the U.S. immigration system that first legalizes millions of undocumented immigrants, and then creates a clear system for workers to come and work in the future with full labor protections.

Families that apply legally for their family members to immigrate should not have to wait for decades. And immigrants who are here must have civil- and human-rights protections — because that is the cornerstone of the American justice system.

We know there are those out there who say this issue is "too difficult, too tough" to make happen this year. But we also know that movements don't wait for things to happen; movements make things happen.

Decades ago, President Franklin D. Roosevelt told legendary activist A. Philip Randolph that he could use his presidential power and the bully pulpit to right many wrongs. But, FDR said, "I would ask one thing of you, Mr. Randolph, and that is go out and make me do it."

On Saturday, more than 20,000 people across the country worked to make their leaders do it, demanding that an immigration-reform bill be introduced in Congress by May 1. In Washington state, more than 8,000 people converged on Seattle from every corner of the state. Thousands filled 75 buses from as far as Walla Walla, Mattawa, Kennewick, Yakima, Vancouver, Bellingham and Mount Vernon, and poured into Occidental Park with banners, hope and resolve.

More than 1,000 Asian Pacific Islander Americans joined with Latinos and Africans, union workers and families, children and business owners, politicians and faith leaders to show the urgent need for immigration reform this year.

Undocumented student Carlos Padilla put it best when he said, "We must all unite together today because we are all family. We are the past, we are the present and we will continue to be the future of this country."

Economically, morally and politically, the rationale for immigration reform grows stronger every day.

Patience is wearing thin for families torn apart by raids and deportations. Millions who have tried to apply legally for family members to join them here wait — cruelly — for decades. Workers can no longer tolerate abusive employers who manipulate them because of their undocumented status and good employers can no longer wait for workers to fill the tough jobs they have open. American workers should not be subjected to a two-tiered wage system that doesn't serve anyone.

So, to those who say wait until next year, next term, next election, we say back: We can't wait. Our human suffering doesn't wait. Our broken families can't wait. Our businesses and workers can't wait. America can't wait.

The Center for American Progress estimates that passing a reform bill would add \$1.5 trillion to the U.S.



enlarge ALAN BERNER / THE SEATTLE TIMES
Thousands rally for immigration reform in Occidental Park.

Video



'Glee' flash mob performances
Inspired by the television show "Glee," more than 800 dancers perform in Westlake Park, Pioneer Square and Seattle Center on a series of Glee flash mob events on Saturday, April 10, 2010.



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economy over the next decade. The libertarian Cato Institute similarly found that the income of U.S. households would increase by \$180 billion in 2019, and lead to an increase in consumer spending that would support 750,000 to 900,000 jobs nationwide.

The Senate leadership has already responded to the pressure from around the country. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., told a cheering crowd of 10,000 in Nevada last weekend that he already had 56 Democratic senators lined up to vote for immigration reform and issued a challenge to Republicans to join Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., in supporting a bill.

Here in Washington, Sen. Patty Murray told the crowd by video that "It is time — right now — this year, to make a change."

And in Illinois, Sen. Dick Durbin declared, "In the name of the families who go to bed with tears in their eyes facing deportation and separation, we cannot fail. We must pass immigration reform."

America can't wait any longer. That's why we need Congress to introduce a just and humane immigration-reform bill before May 1. And we stand ready to make them do it.

Pramila Jayapal is founder and executive director of OneAmerica, the largest immigrant-advocacy organization in Washington state, and actively involved in the national negotiations to get immigration reform passed.

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