

Forum speakers: Lack of detail, fear in community complicate immigration issue

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FRENCH CAMP — The topic of immigration as it relates to economic impact, sanctuaries and policies were discussed during the second of a series of educational programs organized by the League of Women Voters of San Joaquin County.

The two-hour session entitled “Immigration — Learning the Basics,” was held at the Health Plan of San Joaquin building in French Camp on Saturday morning.

The League of Women Voters began planning an education program on the topic and realized that such a topic couldn’t be covered in one session. The first session was held in April, and the third will be in August.

“We were crazy to think that we could do this in a couple hours,” member Susan Mora Loyko said.

“We quickly learned from questions that we had that this is (a) pretty intensive and complicated issue that we’re facing here, not only in our county, but in our state and in our country.”

Saturday’s session featured Bill Herrin, director of International Studies at University of the Pacific, who discussed information on the economics of immigration, and Jose Rodriguez, president of El Concilio, who discussed sanctuaries, safe zones and the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival policy.

Before Herrin dove into a presentation of graphs and data heavy on research from the Pew Research Center, he used a baseball analogy pertaining to San Francisco Giants fans creating an hour-long video of “lowlights,” of the current Los Angeles Dodgers’ season: pitchers giving up home runs, players striking out and fielders making errors.

“They would be very misleading, because if you look at full picture, the Dodgers are one of the best teams in baseball,” Herrin said. “That analogy applies to the debates we hear these days about immigration and trade. All we hear in the news, it seems, are the anecdotes; we never get the full picture, and those anecdotes can be very, very misleading and they can lead to bad policies.”

Among the slides of data Herrin showcased was a CATO Institute Policy Brief published in March that showed illegal immigrants are 44 percent less likely to be incarcerated than native-

born citizens, legal immigrants are 69 percent less likely to be incarcerated than natives, and both legal and illegal immigrants are underrepresented in the incarcerated population while natives are overrepresented.

Herrin said if native-born Americans were incarcerated at the same rate as illegal immigrants, more than 890,000 fewer natives would be in prison. If natives were incarcerated at the same rate as legal immigrants, close to 1.4 million fewer natives would be incarcerated.

“Let the data speak for itself,” Herrin said.

On the topic of sanctuary cities, Rodriguez said the term is simply a goodwill gesture that has no real legal significance. And while DACA, a policy introduced by the Obama administration in 2012, isn’t perfect, it offers relief to young people to give them time to build a career.

DACA allows undocumented immigrants who entered the country as minors to receive a renewable two-year period of deferred action from deportation and become eligible for a work permit.

It currently benefits 800,000 undocumented immigrants and is at risk of ending as soon as this fall. Texas and 10 other states have threatened to sue the federal government if the program continues, and Rodriguez said there is fear within the immigration community that students who could become doctors, lawyers and other careers suddenly will be deported.

“The decisions and rhetoric that is coming out of Washington, D.C., is not necessarily in the best interest of the immigrant community,” he said. “We see a lot of jobs go unfulfilled because they are not able to find the workers ... right now, there is a tremendous amount of fear and anxiety.”

The League of Women Voters is in the process of scheduling the third session, which will feature elected officials.