

Immigration Program at LWV-DE

The National League's immigration study has caught the interest of at least one local group. On May 19, at the regular luncheon meeting of the Down East group, more than a dozen members and three guests listened to a presentation of the eight study papers prepared by the LWV Immigration Study Committee. (The papers and supporting information are on the League website at www.lwv.org/ImmigrationStudy .)

Marti Harmon reviewed the League's study and consensus process, introduced the foundation materials of the study, and summarized the article on immigration history in the last National Voter. After an acknowledgement of the sources and bibliography, each of the eight papers was summarized by a member of the local study committee (Linda Hoskins, Ann Luther, Martha Dickinson, Suzanne Carmichael, Don Carmichael, and Bonnie Preston). After the paper summaries, we tried to weave the various ideas and comments on this provocative topic into a coherent discussion.

Family reunification as a major reason and source of legal immigration (58%-70% of the total number of annual visas) came as a surprise to many members, especially since changes in immigration policies since 9/11 have created enormous backlogs of family visa applications, as well as a review of the established criteria for families. The issue was made quite real by the personal story of one of the guests whose husband in Gambia has been refused a visa.

Worker rights were another area of great concern, including worker protections and wage parity in the current environment of decreasing labor union influence. Questions such as "Do immigrants depress the labor market?" and "Is there any truth in the supposition that American citizens refuse to work in some job fields?" remained unanswered, or were seen more as regional concerns rather than universal.

In reviewing the recently proposed immigration legislation (introduced by Sen. Ted Kennedy (D) of Massachusetts and Sen. Jon Kyl (R) of Arizona), no one in the group felt particularly pleased with the compromises. Along with the proposals for legalization of unauthorized immigrants, the shift from family-based visas to employment-based visas seems to be the greatest change.

Everyone agreed to have a follow-up discussion in September before the consensus vote in the autumn. There was a general feeling that although the eight study papers were informative, they lacked the depth we were looking for. It was decided to continue the study with other formats, such as a panel of individuals who are variously involved with immigration

issues – a farmer who employs seasonal migrant workers, a county planner who understands the employment statistics, a businessman, and perhaps someone from Catholic Charities, the organization authorized to manage immigrant settlement issues. It was also suggested that we read the sourcebook, “Immigration and America's Future: A New Chapter: Report of the Independent Task Force on Immigration and America's Future” co-chaired by Spencer Abraham and Lee H. Hamilton and published by the Migration Policy Institute, 2006.

-- *Marti Harmon, Ellsworth*