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Special Reports

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The Immigration Battle

Issue Affects Families, The Economy



Antonio Mora (http://cbs2chicago.com/bios/local_bio_092161356.html)
Reporting

(CBS) CHICAGO Chicago is a magnet for immigrants of all kinds. By some estimates, there are close to 300,000 undocumented workers in our area. As CBS 2's Antonio Mora reports, they and their families are at the heart of today's immigration battle.

"We have to pray every single day to be together," Adriana said.

Praying is the only hope Adriana's family has left.

"You don't have any idea how it is to go downstairs and get the mail every single day," she said.

That's because any day, the mailbox could hold the end of their American dream: A deportation letter for their father, Francisco.

"In school, I hear like my friends talking about like their dads about doing all these great things, and I can't do anything right now because he doesn't have his papers," Francisco's son, also named Francisco, said.

Fear makes them different from other families in their quiet North Side neighborhood, but it's a fear common among the many immigrant families of mixed status.

Adriana and her kids are U.S. citizens. They own their home and pay their taxes, but Francisco is here illegally. His hopes to stay with his family have all but disappeared.

"I love this country. I lived in this country for 18 years. This is my life," he said.

Should they stay or should they go? Who gets to be an American? How does illegal immigration threaten national security? Are the immigrants a drain on the economy? Do they steal jobs from Americans? Those questions fuel today's passionate immigration debate.

"Do you know that there are 14 million underemployed Americans?" asked Rosanna Pulido, director of the Illinois Minuteman Project.

Pulido, a second generation Mexican-American, is the director of the Illinois Minuteman Project.

"We have people saying, 'Listen, you know what? I don't have jobs anymore because they are passing over me and hiring illegals,'" she said.

Most illegal immigrants in Chicago come from Mexico, followed by those from Poland.

Chicago's illegal immigrants come from everywhere: India, Ireland, Africa, the Middle East and Korea.

"In the United States, there are better systems here and also there are more job opportunities for me," said a Korean immigrant.

But if immigrants get work, some say it's at the expense of Americans.

"Low-skilled Americans suffer something like an 8 percent reduction in their wages because of low-skilled immigration," said Mark Krikorian with the Center for Immigration Studies.

But other studies show salaries drop only 1 percent for manual laborers and don't drop at all for professionals and service workers.

At the University of Illinois at Chicago, a non-partisan group found illegal immigrants have a positive effect on job creation.

"We found that the spending of undocumented immigrants in the Chicago metro area accounted for about 31,000 jobs every year," said Nik Theodore.

Nik Theodore is director of the Center for Urban Economic Development at UIC.

"The spending of undocumented immigrants, as it ripples through the economy, accounts for a \$5.4

billion dollars in the Chicago metro area annually," Theodore said.

"The benefit to those who are not immigrants is miniscule and is completely wiped out by the extra social costs that immigrants incur," Krikorian said.

Not so, according to the UIC study.

"We found very, very low levels of usage of public assistance and other public benefits," Theodore said.

Some studies have even found illegal immigrants contribute more to public revenues than they take out in public services.

And as the immigration debate rages on, many worry about the social consequences of breaking up families.

"We are tearing at the fabric of our values as a society by splitting up husband and wife, because of our immigration laws," said Loyola University's Margaret McCormick.

Something Adriana knows all too well.

"I have faith. And I hope that the people in charge of the laws of this country, that they are going to understand that we need to be together," she said.

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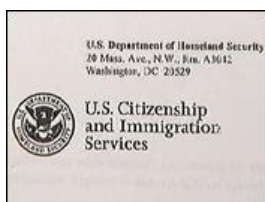
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