



At Latino Memphis, optimism; but ultimate goal is permanent U.S. residency

By Scott Carroll

Posted June 16, 2012 at midnight

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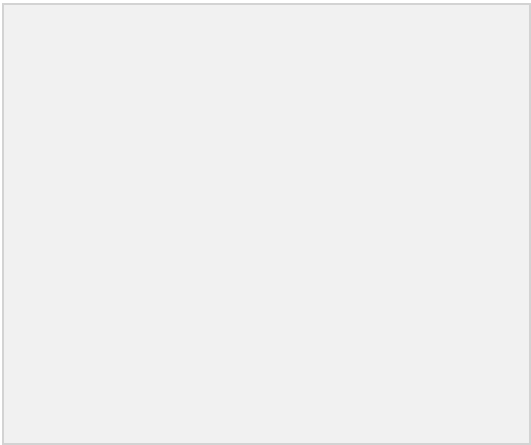
A sampling of local documented and undocumented Hispanic immigrants expressed cautious optimism Friday after President Barack Obama announced changes to American immigration policy.

At the headquarters of Latino Memphis, immigrant rights advocates said that although the policy is a step forward for millions of immigrants seeking better jobs and education in the U.S., as well as keeping families together in lieu of deportation, their ultimate goal remains to secure permanent residency or, in several cases, become citizens.

Gaby Benitez, a 24-year-old organizer with the Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition, said Latino Memphis and other local immigrant rights groups will continue to pressure legislators to pass the Dream Act, which would grant permanent residency to immigrants under several similar conditions as Friday's announced policy.

The Dream Act passed in the House of Representatives but failed in the Senate in 2010.

"We, as undocumented youth, are going to continue that pressure and will continue on until President Obama hears those demands," said Benitez, who was granted temporary resident status by the U.S. after coming to America at 6 years old. "We're very, very thankful for this historic announcement that was made today, but we want to make clear that this is not at all amnesty. This does not provide any path to citizenship, and the requirements to this historic announcement are quite stringent and very temporary."



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Benitez, who is the oldest of four children but the only one not born in the U.S., was one of several speakers at Latino Memphis on Friday who is eligible for relief under the new immigration policy. Qualifying undocumented immigrants are those under 30 who came to the U.S. before they were 16 years old.

Brenda Zapata, 17, of Saint Louis in Mexico, came to the U.S. when she was 18 months old. She shared Benitez's sentiment.

"We've accomplished something, but what we want is that right there," Zapata said, pointing to a banner with "Dream Act" printed on it. "Because that would lead us to citizenship, which is what we want. Most of us, as youth, have grown up in this country. This is our home and we want to contribute wherever we can."

Foreign-born persons account for 6 percent of the population in Shelby County, higher than the statewide portion of 4.4 percent, according to data from the U.S. Census Bureau.

-- Scott Carroll: (901) 529-2623

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June 16, 2012
2:09 a.m.

[popover2](#) writes:

The 24 year old does not have to worry because surely once his siblings become 21 they can apply for him.

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June 16, 2012
10:21 a.m.

[Nightcrawler](#) writes:

"...after President Barack Obama announced changes to American immigration policy."

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The Usurper-in-Chief has spoken! All bow to his wisdom, his disastrous re-election campaign and his panic mode for buying votes.

If someone wants to bet you a hundred dollars that the Usurper-in-Chief will win a second turn, take their money; it's guaranteed easy money...

June 16, 2012
11:11 a.m.

[Rule321](#) writes:

Don't worry Mr. Obama made this clear 'this is not a path to citizenship' as these individuals are for all intents and purposes Americans. Did he mean Central Americans? This is the kind of verbal gymnastics our President displays day in and day out. Why not be clear? Central Americans, South Americans and Canadians don't call themselves Americans so the only correct interpretation of the President's remarks is that he called these individuals Americans which is synonymous with 'citizens of the U.S.A.' but in the same sentence deferred their deportation for two years. So they are citizen's in the President's eyes but we are deporting them.

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June 16, 2012
11:23 a.m.

[Rule321](#) writes:

Note that most Hispanics are seeking 'permanent residency' in the U.S. and not citizenship. I have experienced this first hand as many have told me that they want to make a certain amount of money in the U.S. and then return to live out their lives in Mexico.

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I fully support citizenship of those who seek to live and die in the U.S.A. but anything else is ROBBERY of jobs of American citizens who will spend their earned paychecks in U.S. stores and pay U.S. taxes.

On one hand, we need this labor force but 'permanent residency' is not the appropriate solution.

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