



For Immediate Release
Friday, March 30, 2007

PRESS RELEASE
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Asian American Leaders Announce Overwhelming Opposition to Anti-Family Immigration Proposal

Washington, D.C. – Asian American leaders joined the Asian American Justice Center (AAJC) in announcing strong opposition by the Asian American community to the set of principles created by a group of Republican Senators including Jon Kyl (R-AZ) and supported by the Bush Administration.

“This set of principles is a nonstarter – they don’t work,” said AAJC President and Executive Director Karen K. Narasaki. “They don’t address the underlying problems leading to undocumented immigration – and, in fact, the policies would actually exacerbate the problems. They offer only false promises to the undocumented already here. And they are very anti-family.”

The White House has been working privately for several weeks with Republican congressional representatives most opposed to comprehensive immigration reform. Their plan was to generate a set of principles for immigration reform to gain support for President Bush’s plan to enact laws that would address the some 12 million undocumented immigrants now in the country, while regularizing the flow of low-wage workers. These principles were revealed this week.

The proposal would create new temporary visas both for those who are currently undocumented, as well as new workers. But it includes no protections, and no path to citizenship for the majority of these immigrants. Most of the features were in last year’s legislation introduced by Sens. Kyl and John Cornyn (R-TX).

One new and radical feature in the proposal is to shift our immigration system to be almost completely based on corporate sponsorship, while either severely curtailing – or even eliminating altogether – the ability of U.S. citizens to bring their parents into the country. These provisions would also eliminate all other categories of family visas for sons and daughters over the age of 21, as well as brothers and sisters, of U.S. citizens. This would leave visas available only for spouses and minor children of U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents.

Under these proposals, however, few immigrants would be realistically eligible to become legal permanent residents. In addition, new immigrant workers would not be able to bring their spouses and minor children. Current undocumented immigrants, meanwhile, would only be given temporary visa cards and also would be barred from petitioning for their families.

The Asian American Justice Center (www.advancingequality.org) is a national organization dedicated to defending and advancing the civil and human rights of Asian Americans. It works closely with three affiliates – the Asian American Institute in Chicago (www.aaichicago.org), the Asian Law Caucus (www.asianlawcaucus.org) in San Francisco and the Asian Pacific American Legal Center (www.apalc.org) in Los Angeles – and 102 community partners in 47 cities and 24 states in the country.

“Our communities will not accept this anti-family proposal from the White House. This is a reminder to Asian Pacific Americans that the current efforts for changing our immigration laws demand our attention and full participation. On April 30th and May 1st, hundreds will be coming to Washington, D.C. to remind Congress and President Bush that family is at the core of immigration and America,” said Eun Sook Lee, Executive Director of the National Korean American Service and Education Consortium.

Former U.S. Civil Rights Commissioner Yvonne Lee added that “there are leaders in the House and Senate who want a workable and fair system that serve our economy and strengthen our communities. This cruel proposal would create a 21st Century version of ‘coolie labor’ – one in which immigrants are wanted for their hard work but not allowed to put down roots and build families and communities. Asian Americans still remember the painful legacies of our community’s bachelors’ societies created by such policies.”

“More than 1.5 million Asians are waiting to join their close family members, many for six to 24 years,” said Stewart Kwoh, Executive Director of the Asian Pacific American Legal Center. “Not only does this proposal do nothing to address this tremendous backlog, it would charge those waiting for long periods because of U.S. immigration policies an additional \$500 fee to keep their place in line and then would eliminate the categories altogether, This is outrageous.”

“While we do need to make more visas available to the employment-based immigration system, such reform need not and should not come at the expense of family immigration,” said Tuyet Le, Executive Director of the Asian American Institute of Chicago, citing a study by the Urban Institute and the National Science Foundation. “Otherwise, America will lose out on the benefits that family immigration has to offer to society and to our economy.”

The proposal is to set up a so-called merit-based point system for green cards which, in addition to employment, would require the ability to pay for health care insurance, own a home and even go so far as to examine how well the children of immigrants are doing in school.

“These requirements, in practice, would make it virtually impossible for the vast majority of immigrants who work hard – often at two or more jobs without health insurance – to have the security of legal permanent residency and a path to citizenship, making them perpetually vulnerable to exploitation by employers,” said Gen Fujioka, Director of Programs of the Asian Law Caucus.

The proposal would allow new workers to come in only temporarily, for two years at a time, then having to return home for six months before coming back again. They would be unable to bring their families with them.

“In barring immigrants from reuniting with their families,” said George C. Wu, AAJC’s National Asian Pacific American Bar Association Partners Community Law Fellow, “the principles proposed actually make the U.S. all the less attractive to the best, hardest working and most entrepreneurial immigrants who now have many other places in the world to give their talents to.”

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