

Dine 4 Democracy March 2017 Dinner
Suggested Theme: Immigration and Refugee Issues

In many ways, immigration was the signature issue of the Trump campaign. President Trump opened his campaign by calling Mexicans rapists and criminals, pledging to “build a wall”, and promising to create a “deportation force.” At one point he suggested that we would institute a ban on Muslims from entering the United States.

While many thought this was just typical Trump campaign bluster, the President has moved forward on his agenda--sometimes swiftly, sometimes unsteadily. One of his first actions in office was to issue the now infamous executive order banning the travel of citizens from seven nations with majority Muslim populations, including dual citizens and green card holders. Mass protests erupted, and eventually the Ninth Circuit Court upheld a stay on the ban--but the Trump administration is currently drafting a revised order which may fare better, as courts have traditionally granted the executive branch broad authority on immigration so long as no clear racial or religious animus is in evidence.

In addition to the travel ban, Trump also issued two other executive orders boosting enforcement of immigration laws, broadening the pool of immigrants who are selected for deportation, expediting deportation hearings, and deputizing local law enforcement in the process. Homeland Security Secretary John F Kelly published two memos meant to serve as guidelines for implementing Trump’s executive orders. The new DHS policies have significant implications, expanding the criteria for prioritized deportation beyond the “felons, not families” policy that Obama championed, to those who have been charged with crimes (but not convicted), those who have committed a “chargeable criminal offense”, those who the immigration officer decides are “a risk to public safety”, and those who “engaged in fraud or willful misrepresentation in connection with any official matter before a governmental agency.”

Because being an undocumented immigrant by its very nature requires some measure of illegality (for example, driving without a license or working and paying taxes under an assumed Social Security number), many have argued that these criteria can be broadly interpreted to give officials latitude to target most of the 11 million undocumented immigrant population in the US as “priority” deportations.

The provisions also ordered the hiring of 10,000 new immigration enforcement officers and 5,000 new Border Patrol agents--the aforementioned “deportation force” in all but name. The policies additionally make it possible for immigrants who have been in the country up to two years to be sent through expedited deportations (which was previously limited to those who had been in the country two weeks or less) and halted an Obama administration policy that allowed some immigrants, particularly child immigrants, to live with relatives (rather than in detention centers) while waiting weeks or months for hearings in immigration courts. Additionally, the DHS provisions also provide funds for reports on statistics about apprehended undocumented immigrants, including detailed reports on “sanctuary” jurisdictions that choose to release immigrants from custody--seen as an effort to publicly vilify jurisdictions that are refusing to assist the Trump administration in these immigration policies.

Despite Trump’s campaign pledge to “immediately terminate” the [Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals \(DACA\)](#) directive instituted by the Obama administration, the DHS memos left the fate of the directive to “future guidance.” DACA has provided work permits to [more than 750,000 immigrants](#)

who came to the country illegally as children.

The Trump administration has since backpedaled on the rhetoric around these directives, denying that the goal of the orders is mass deportations and with officials saying that these policy shifts would take time to implement. Last week, during a White House luncheon before his first address to Congress, Trump suggested that he is open to create an immigration bill to overhaul the country's immigration system and provide an avenue for some undocumented immigrants to achieve legal status. He specifically noted that DREAMers (those who would have gained conditional residency under the DREAM Act, had it passed) "shouldn't be very worried" because he "has a big heart". However, this statement came immediately before Trump invited three relatives of Americans with relatives who had been killed by undocumented immigrants and announced his intention to create a [Victims Of Immigration Crime Engagement office](#) (VOICE) within DHS. Critics say VOICE will serve as a government anti-immigrant fearmongering effort.

WHAT CAN YOU DO? Immigrants and refugee advocacy organizations work on the local level to protect, advise, and serve the vulnerable in their communities. Some focus on legal aid to immigrant communities; some focus on assimilation and community-building. [This website](#) has a handy search tool for both legal and non-legal advocacy organizations. In many states, [Catholic Charities](#) does secular work on providing services to immigrant and refugee communities, and is often seeking new volunteers.

Organizing for Action is encouraging ordinary citizens, especially those in sanctuary cities (municipalities where law enforcement officials are restricted from cooperating with Immigrations and Customs Enforcement) to write "Letters to the Editor" explaining why immigrant rights are important for them and their communities. They have a handy guide for doing so [here](#). Diners might consider joining this letter-writing campaign.

"Immigration" mostly conjures thoughts of migrants from Latin America, but Muslim immigrants and refugees are no less at risk. There are a number of Muslim-advocacy organizations in the United States, including [MPAC](#), which works "for the civil rights of American Muslims, for the integration of Islam into American pluralism, and for a positive, constructive relationship between American Muslims and their representatives." Or, on a more local level, why not contact the nearest mosque to your community?

And, as always, let your elected officials at all levels of government [know what you think](#).

This month, we are encouraging everyone to identify a local organization working on an aspect of the immigration issue. One of the most enriching aspects from last month for one of the Washington, DC dinners was having a staff person from Families USA present for the evening. You don't have to be in DC to find a group working on major issues, so we encourage everyone to identify groups in their local community and invite them over for dinner!

If you'd like a little help, here are some groups at the forefront of the immigration debates that have a presence across the country:

- ACLU (check out your state chapter!)
- American Immigration Lawyers Association
- Southern Poverty Law Center

- Lutheran Social Services
- Catholic Charities USA
- Or, contact a local community center for immigrants in your community.