

# Democrats advise concerned immigrant community to prepare for deportation

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Responding to a public outpouring of fear over the Trump administration's deportation program, Democratic Congressman Juan Vargas of California's 51st District hosted an Immigration Town Hall meeting in San Diego last month titled "Know Your Rights."

The nearly 100 attendees at the July 10 event, hosted in California's southernmost district which covers the state's 137-mile border with Mexico and has a nearly 70 percent Hispanic population, expected to find information on how to protect themselves from the specter of ICE arrests.

However, the Town Hall proved to be little more than a platform for the Democrats to publically shed crocodile tears while offering little more than advice on how to streamline their arrest and deportation hearing proceedings.

The event consisted of presentations by representatives from the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), the American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA), US Immigration and Customs Services (USICS), as well as Vargas and former California State Assemblyman Nathan Fletcher.

Vargas introduced the panel and feigned sympathy for the community's concerns by channeling anger towards the Trump administration and away from the Democratic Party which deported nearly 3 million immigrants during the tenure of former President Barack Obama, including busloads of unaccompanied youth, mothers and children who fled violence and gang extortion in Central America.

Nathan Fletcher, the State Assemblyman, ex-mayoral candidate, and husband to Democratic State Assemblywoman Lorena Gonzalez, began with an appeal for the deported immigrant veteran advocacy group he leads, Honorably Discharged, Dishonorably Deployed. His self-serving presentation sought to whip

up outrage over the treatment of deported veterans as a means of boosting his bid for San Diego County Supervisor in 2018.

Avoiding the criminal nature of Washington's wars abroad, Fletcher deployed nationalist chauvinism and patriotism in defense of deported veterans. A former Marine deployed in the Sunni triangle of Iraq in 2004, Fletcher's quick rise within the Democratic Party establishment has been based on his status as a war veteran, as well as his 2010 sponsorship of Chelsea's Law, which forced life without parole and harsher punishments on those convicted of violent sexual assault.

Vargas and Fletcher volleyed praises throughout the meeting, each posing as a champion of immigrants and veterans. They promoted the spineless House Bill 2761, known as Healthcare Opportunities for Patriots in Exile (HOPE) Act of 2017, which would allow deported veterans to enter the US to obtain health services, but would force them to return to their home country afterward. The explanation that veterans would have to return to their country of deportation rendered a laugh of spite from many within the crowd.

The irony behind Vargas's proposal is that the VA is shuttering many health facilities, causing untold hardship for veterans, both immigrant and nonimmigrant alike. This pathetic "compromise" with the Trump administration sums up the reactionary character of the Democratic Party, including its Latino representatives who cynically posture as defenders of immigrants, as well as the lawyers and non-profit organizations that operate within the orbit of the Democratic Party.

The meeting continued with the eponymous presentation "Know Your Rights" by ACLU representative Esmeralda Flores. Reviewing the legal

basis on which immigrants can supposedly exercise their “rights” to protect themselves from ICE agents, Flores made clear there was no recourse beyond silent submission.

Families can deny ICE agents entry into their homes if they come without a warrant. However, Flores noted that ICE agents often disregard this requirement and proceed to intrude upon immigrant homes anyway and are known to detain anyone they find in the home who is unable to prove their legal status.

Ominously, Flores warned in these situations it is best to remain silent but one must verbally state they are practicing that right, or else their silence will be taken for a lack of cooperation, which will “escalate the situation.”

Attorney Tammy Lin of the American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA) presented an overview of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. Implemented in 2012 by Obama, the program allows select immigrants who entered the US illegally as minors to receive a renewable two-year period of deferred action from deportation and eligibility for a work permit after thorough screening and background checks.

Lin noted that since Trump’s inauguration, many are wondering whether or not to apply for DACA as it would essentially hand over to the government the whereabouts and personal information of an undocumented person. DACA has already accumulated information on 800,000 undocumented immigrants.

“What we’ve kind of agreed upon in the immigration attorney community is if you already have DACA, renew it... Should you apply if you don’t have it? That’s something you really need to talk with your family about. There are a lot of benefits to it.”

In February, the first DREAMer (DACA enrollee), Juan Manuel Montes, was deported with the backing of former Homeland Security Secretary Gen. John Kelly despite Montes’ supposed protection under the Obama-era program.

Attorney Matt Holt, also of AILA, advised attendees to prepare for the legal bureaucratic hurdles leading to their eventual deportation. “I’m here to make sure people aren’t wrongfully removed from this country,” he said, stressing that individuals should secure an established attorney as soon as possible, while warning that there are lawyers who often scam immigrants,

either knowingly or due to unfamiliarity with immigration law.

Holt explained that since Trump took office there had been an increased mobilization of ICE agents throughout the country. “ICE is everywhere,” he said. Immigration officials are being posted outside schools, grocery markets, and homes to carry out dated arrest warrants for immigrants, with growing attention to those without a criminal conviction.

The town hall did nothing quell community concerns and amounted to defeated “advice” on how to ensure a smooth deportation. The consensus from the panel was that families prepare an “emergency plan” for the day that ICE decides to arrive at their home, noting that nearly 180 immigrant parents have been deported every day since January. They were encouraged to secure passports for their US-born children so that if they are taken away they will be able to travel to see their parents *sooner*.

A Question and Answer session followed when questions were submitted to the speakers by notecard which could be filtered out. Most of the questions selected pertained to technical or procedural questions regarding DACA and naturalization.

WSWS reporters submitted a question on Obama’s legacy of deporting nearly three million immigrants to which Vargas responded, “I was disappointed.” This received shouts from several audience members who were upset with the lackluster answer, with one individual condemning the Democratic Party’s alliance with Wall Street and for-profit immigration detention centers.

WSWS reporters spoke with a number of attendees who all agreed that the meeting was disappointing and offered no challenge to mass deportations. Brian, a young man who had driven over an hour to attend the meeting denounced former President Obama’s legacy of mass deportations and noted that the root problem was the control of finance capital over the political system concluding that, “immigrants have no friends with the Democrats.”



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