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## The STRIVE Act Is a False Promise

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t r u t h o u t | Guest Columnist

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Oakland, California – On the street, true immigration reform means: fixing the family reunification system so families won't be separated; legalization for the undocumented without incremental phases that stretch out for years; due process and equal rights for immigrants; immigrant worker freedom from exploitation and employer abuse, and an end to criminalization of immigrants on the border and in the interior.

We also need a serious investigation of immigration's root causes – economic, military or environmental – which cause the dislocation of people from countries of origin. What role do our country's policies play in that dislocation? Our national blind spot is that we see immigration one-dimensionally – only from our side of the border.

Unfortunately, we're getting none of these things from Congress in 2007. Congress continues to view immigrants through a national security and disposable-worker lens, proposing harsh enforcement while it moves away from permanent, family-based immigration toward temporary worker programs. For the aspiring millions who spoke out for immigrant rights last year, this is not the response we wanted.

STRIVE (Security Through Regularized Immigration and a Vibrant Economy Act of 2007), introduced by Congressmen Luis Gutierrez and Jeff Flake, continues to mistakenly frame immigration policy as a national security issue. In STRIVE, "comprehensive immigration reform" means trading some improvements in the family reunification system for greater numbers of temporary workers, and continued criminalization of immigrants. Advocates for immigrant rights will not find a human rights perspective in this bill.

STRIVE ramps up the militarization of the border and interior enforcement. An electronic employment–verification system and reporting regulations will lead to increased racial profiling, more detentions and deportations, and the spending of precious resources on more jails.

STRIVE increases employer sanctions. While sanctions don't prevent employers from hiring the undocumented, they are a hammer over the heads of immigrants – used to fire immigrant workers who organize or protest mistreatment.

Thousands of families are waiting for an end to the backlogs that have separated members for as many as 20 years. STRIVE does not increase the current cap of 480,000 visas, so the reunification of separated families will still take years. (In her very different bill, Rep. Sheila Jackson–Lee (D–Texas) has proposed to double family visas, which would go a long way towards ending these terrible backlogs.)

STRIVE offers a "path to citizenship" that could take two decades if an applicant is able to satisfy excessive criteria. Applicants must first endure a temporary status for six years. An immigrant can then apply for permanent residence, but this won't kick in until other applicants, already in the pipeline for visas, have received theirs. Given current backlogs, that could take five to ten years, since STRIVE doesn't increase the number of available visas. Also, Homeland Security must put in place a document–verification system and new border–surveillance technology before legalization can even start. That also could take years. Once legalized, people would still have to wait at least five years more before gaining eligibility for citizenship, pushing that goal to nearly two decades. Throughout those years, applicants must remain employed to keep their application alive – a sure formula for employer abuse.

If STRIVE becomes law, the number of temporary visas (400,000–plus) will begin to exceed the number of permanent resident visas, a trend supported by President Bush. STRIVE increases temporary worker visas in spite of the system's documented abuse. The Southern Poverty Law Center's recent report, "Close to Slavery," exposed yet again that intractable abuses are inherent in temporary worker programs. With increased job

competition, temporary workers would jeopardize the already fragile place immigrants have in the economy.

We have no need for temporary workers if we legalize the more than ten million undocumented, and make visas available for the four million family members whose applications are already approved.

STRIVE does include provisions like the DREAM Act, the AgJOBS Act, the Strengthening American Citizenship Act, and would provide visas for the sons and daughters of Filipino WWII veterans. These are all positive measures that should be passed as separate bills.

We should not support a bill that: does not offer a viable plan to legalize the undocumented, shifts immigration policy away from uniting families to provide employers with temporary workers, increases the likelihood of raids and treats immigrants like criminals.

The STRIVE Act is a false promise when we desperately need real solutions.

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