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13,000 jam Navy Pier to gain legal status

By John Wojcik and Laura Cambron

On Aug. 15, Navy Pier transformed into New York's Ellis Island. Instead of seeing the Statue of Liberty welcome them, it was the Chicago skyline.

Thirteen thousand young immigrants lined up to seek legal status under a new Obama administration program. These immigrants were different from their forebears who applied for legal status on Ellis Island. They didn't arrive at the pier here in boats from overseas. They came instead by bus, by car, by train, and on foot from Chicago and other towns across the Midwest, because they have lived in this country for most of their lives.

The thousands who came out in the open yesterday with their undocumented status did so for the first time knowing that, as of yesterday, they were under the protection of an executive order issued June 15 by President Barack Obama.

"We are so glad about this huge turnout," said a jubilant Lawrence Benito, executive director of the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, the sponsoring organization, "and we are so glad that people haven't listened to those voices telling us it was too dangerous to come out in the open."

Benito said that by 1 p.m., 11,500 people of the 13,000 who showed up had already been served and that people should check the coalition's website, dreamrelief.org, for information about additional application events.

The president's order, which took effect yesterday, frees more than 1.2 million youth nation-



wide from fear of deportation. Those born after June 15, 1981, who came to the U.S. before they were 16 are eligible if they are in school, have graduated from high school or have been honorably discharged from the U.S. armed forces. Successful applicants also must have a clean criminal record. Those granted approval would be given a two-year deferral from deportation and legal authorization to work.

The crowds of young immigrants, carrying everything from school records to plane and boat tickets as proof of time spent in the U.S., backed

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up half a mile into Millennium Park.

Among the most anxious on the lines were young mothers and fathers, sometimes carrying

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their U.S.-born babies.

Carmella Velez, 22, from Elmwood Park said, "I am an American, I came here from Mexico when I was two." Holding up her 18 month-old-baby, she said, "I can never leave my Nydia. What if they try to deport me? I don't know any other country. I love this country and I love my baby. She is a citizen and I am not. How can that be?"

Georgina Villa, 46, was with her two sons, Jorge, 19 and Miguel, 17, both community college students.

She wept openly as Jorge took a packet of forms from a coalition volunteer who was assisting him at a table in the packed Grand Ballroom at the pier.

"I am so happy for my sons," she said.

Putting his arm around his mother, Miguel said, "What she has sacrificed for us can never be repaid, but we will fight until she too can have the legal status she deserves. No woman who has sacrificed and worked like my mother deserves to be kicked out of the country," he said.

The Villa family joined thousands of other immigrants at the event, which was half college

fair and legal advice clinic and half rally. When the attendees rose to their feet in the Navy Pier ballroom to recite the Pledge of Allegiance it was a solemn moment.

One volunteer helping the applicants was Dr. Gloria Valiente, a pediatrician with a private practice in Chicago.

"Only yesterday I treated a young boy in my office," she said, "who was nervous, depressed and unable to eat.

"Like so many others of my patients he has anxiety over the fear of separation from his family. It's something kids are living with and when I started to realize the connection with the immigration problem I felt I had to do something to help," she said.

The DREAM Act into Congress, in Dec. 2010, it passed the House 216-208. Although it had the support of 55 Senators, a clear majority, a Republican filibuster blocked it from passing.



John Wojcik is PW labor editor.

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What's good about Obamacare?

By PW Editorial Board

At a recent meeting in the Kansas City area, Sen. Claire McCaskill, D-Mo., asked those in attendance, "What is it about Obamacare that you don't like?" It's a relevant question; Republicans are making hay out the nation's half-vs.-half split over the law.

Of course, everyone in the meeting couldn't come up with an answer because they were all labor leaders who liked the plan.

Most people who hate "Obamacare," officially called "The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act," don't hate the plan as much as they hate the president, McCaskill said. President Obama, she added, "could come up with a cure for cancer and still be hated by many Americans and all of the Tea Party members," McCaskill told the group.

"But let's focus on why the Health Care Act is a positive law for the United States:

"**THE COST:** The new law will actually reduce the federal deficits. The non-partisan Congressional Budget Office and the bipartisan Joint Congressional Committee on Taxation predict the law will reduce health care spending by \$143 billion over the next 10 years. Small businesses can now claim tax credits for 35 percent of their health care costs. By 2014, small businesses will be able

to join state-created health insurance marketplaces (the exchanges) that will allow pooling of health care dollars, further reducing costs.

"**MEDICARE:** The current benefits of Medicare are still guaranteed and will include free annual checkups and other tests and vaccines have been added. In addition the Part D drug payment "doughnut hole" will be closed by 2020. Coverage limits are gone and no longer will you be rejected due to pre-existing medical conditions.

"**CHILDREN:** This is a great benefit for many of the children out there who have had difficulty getting jobs and having to live at home. Under this act, insurers must cover children until their 26th birthday under their parents' policies," McCaskill said.

"**THE MANDATE:** This is one of the plan's biggest advantages and interestingly enough is the most contentious of the provisions. The mandate insists that by 2014 everyone must have adequate insurance coverage or pay a fine. Interestingly, it is the Republicans that object to this the most. We already have such mandates in place in other areas. Everyone must have auto insurance and everyone must pay income taxes.

And right now the best way to defend Obamacare is to defeat the GOP in November.

Contrary to what is suggested in the mass media, these crimes are neither completely inexplicable nor completely random.

Republicans fear Ryan pick could sink GOP

By John Wojcik

Congressional Republicans aren't admitting it, but they are nervous as hell about Paul Ryan being the party's VP nominee.

Presumptive Republican presidential nominee Mitt Romney's selection of Ryan derails the attempt by Republicans in the House to keep their vote to end Medicare quiet, making that vote one of the very things the election will be all about. Polls show 79 percent of Americans oppose any changes in the nature of the program and also oppose any cuts in Medicare.

House Speaker John Boehner said there were "safer" choices that Romney could have made. Another GOP pro said to Politico, "This could be the defining moment of the campaign. If [the Republicans] win the battle to define Medicare, then I believe Romney wins the presidency. If they lose it, then they lose big in the fall."

Former Rep. Tom Reynolds, R-N.Y., who chaired the National Republican Campaign Committee from 2003-2006, warned that the choice of Ryan made this election similar to the one in 2006, which cost the GOP control of the House. That disaster for Republicans followed an attempt by Bush to create a voucher program for Social Security.

"You saw what happened to George Bush with Social Security in the 2006 election," he said. "This is déjà vu."

GOP nervousness over the Ryan pick extends to the Senate too.

Already Republicans in competitive Senate races are distancing themselves from Ryan's stand on Medicare, even the conservative George Allen, who is running for the open Senate seat in Virginia.

"This is the day that the music dies," said a Republican strategist involved in 2012 House races after the announcement of the Ryan pick. The operative said that every House candidate is now racing to get ahead of the Medicare issue.

Republicans have been trying to make the



election a referendum on what they describe as President Barack Obama's failures, while Obama and Democrats have pointed out that the election is a choice about two very different views of the future.

The selection of Ryan allows the Democrats to define the nature of the election, according to a Republican lawyer in Washington. "It turned a referendum into a choice," he said.

"Choosing Ryan forfeited the no-real-world-experience point Romney has been building up for months about Obama and put a new state, Florida, in play that was otherwise trending his way," the lawyer told Politico.

While Republicans are lamenting the Ryan pick takes attention away from the economy and jobs and shifts it to issues like Medicare, Democrats say the Ryan pick wouldn't help them with a sharper focus on unemployment, either.

Ari Berman at the Nation noted just yesterday "the most disturbing feature of the Ryan budget is that, in the midst of a prolonged recession, it would cost the U.S. economy millions of jobs."

In contrast, the jobs plan introduced by Obama last September (which the GOP-controlled House refuses to pass) would create 1.9 million jobs and reduce the unemployment rate by a full percentage point, according to Mark Zandi, chief economist at Moody's.

Seventy-nine percent of Americans oppose any changes in the nature of the program and also oppose any cuts in Medicare.

Ohio labor launches election drive

By Rick Nagin

Warning that organized labor and American democracy itself face dire threats if the GOP wins the presidential election, former Gov. Ted Strickland joined hundreds of AFL-CIO officials to kick off the Ohio Labor 2012 election effort here Wednesday.

"We are not dealing with your parents' and grandparents' Republican Party," Strickland said. "They have been taken over by radicals and extremists, and if we don't recognize the danger, we could lose everything."

GOP presidential candidate Mitt Romney's recent choice of Rep. Paul Ryan as his running mate makes that crystal clear, Strickland said.

"Romney has no core beliefs," Strickland said, but Ryan's philosophy was formed by Ayn Rand, the right-wing Russian émigré who wrote, "Money is the barometer of a society's virtues."

"In other words, anyone who has to struggle is somehow inferior," Strickland said. "This is Social Darwinism" - an idea popularly known as "survival of the fittest."

Romney was "born into privilege and wants to be president to protect the privileged," he charged. "Ryan voted against extending unemployment benefits. He wants to privatize Social Security and eviscerate Medicare."

"They are not joking. They have resources. They have the Supreme Court."

Former State AFL-CIO President Joe Rugola said the current Republican Party is run by "theocrats."

"Don't b.s. one union member. This is precisely where we'll end up again," Rugola said. "Make no mistake about it. They plan to put workers back in chains."

Crisis alimentaria

Por Alberto Ampuero

Una sequía severa en Estados Unidos ha golpeado las cosechas de maíz y ha hecho subir los precios hasta 60 por ciento en sólo dos meses.

"El repunte de los precios no sólo afectará el del pan y los alimentos elaborados, sino también el del forraje y, en última instancia, de la carne", informó el Banco Mundial.

El impacto ha alcanzado a los procesadores de alimentos, que incluyen Nestlé, Kraft y Tyson, los que ya advirtieron que le trasladarán los altos precios a los consumidores.

En tanto, la Reserva Federal de Kansas City afirma de que en 2013 los estadounidenses pagarán precios más altos de los alimentos en el supermercado.

El precio del maíz y del trigo, dos de los granos que junto con el arroz constituyen la base de la alimentación de la mayoría de los habitantes, aumentó casi 50 por ciento desde junio pasado.

Según informó la ONG Intermón Oxfam, este aumento en los precios pone en riesgo la vida de más de 1.000 millones de personas en todo el mundo.

En EE.UU., los alimentos representan aproximadamente un 13% del presupuesto de la familia promedio.

Sin embargo, es probable que la Gran Sequía tenga sus efectos más devastadores en la arena internacional, debido a que muchos países dependen de las importaciones de granos de Estados Unidos.

En México, hasta julio pasado los precios de la canasta básica se habían incrementado 6.2 por ciento, los de alimentos y bebidas no alcohólicas 8.87, y los de los productos agropecuarios 11.27 por ciento.

El alza en el precio de los alimentos en México, que se ha sentido en

productos como tortilla, huevo, pollo y algunas legumbres, afecta más a la población de menores ingresos, que son los que destinan hasta 50 por ciento de sus recursos monetarios a la compra de comida, muestran datos oficiales.

Michael Klare (Tomdispatch, 8/8/12) señala que el alza de los precios alimentarios revivió "las memorias de la crisis 2007/2008" que desencadenó revueltas, cuando el arroz, el maíz y el trigo tuvieron aumentos de precios de 100% o más, los precios fuertemente aumentados -especialmente para el pan- provocaron "disturbios alimentarios" en más de dos docenas de países, incluidos Bangladesh, Camerún, Egipto, Haití, Indonesia, Senegal, y Yemen.

Esos aumentos de precios de 2007-2008 fueron atribuidos en gran parte al creciente coste del petróleo, que encareció la producción de alimentos. Al mismo tiempo, cada vez más tierra de cultivo en todo el mundo estaba siendo desviada de cultivos alimentarios al cultivo de plantas utilizadas en la producción de biocombustibles.

El siguiente aumento de precios en 2010-11 estuvo, sin embargo, estrechamente asociado con el cambio climático. Una intensa sequía afectó a gran parte de Rusia oriental durante el verano de 2010, reduciendo en un quinto la cosecha de trigo en esa región y llevando a Moscú a prohibir todas las exportaciones de trigo.

Una vez más, un aumento en los precios de los alimentos llevó a una agitación social generalizada, esta vez concentrada en el Norte de África y Medio Oriente. El creciente coste de los alimentos básicos, especialmente, una barra de pan, fue una causa de agitación en Egipto, Jordania, y Sudán, indicó Klare.

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