

Writing Sample: Journal Star Editorial

Local View: Stuck between Barack and a hard place

By Juan Gallegos

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The Journal Star's editorial on Nov. 25 emphasized that President Obama's executive action that protected undocumented parents of legal permanent residents and U.S. citizens from deportation was the wrong way to go.

In my long years fighting for immigration reform, I can tell you that any change that prevents the separation of families in this country is a welcome change!

Changes in our broken immigration system are not about who makes them. They are not about Congress, and they are not about the president. Those changes are about living, breathing, tax-paying human beings. Beings who have children, who are heads of households, who care for the new generation of Americans.

Many times, politicians in Washington and media executives everywhere forget that, at the end of the day, the changes in the enforcement of a broken immigration system are not about politics or the relatively small number of politicians acting like children -- not being able to compromise and threatening to shut down the government at any instance of disagreement.

Immigration policy only touches their lives when it becomes news or when it's convenient. The recent changes in our immigration system are about the lives of the people in every state -- people like my aunt and uncle who live in South Dakota, who for years have worked the hardest jobs at a dairy farm, doing the jobs nobody wants in the places nobody wants to be.

With those jobs and in those places, they have been able to raise three children, two of whom are U.S. citizens and one who is a Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipient. Not only were my aunt and uncle able to feed and clothe their children, but they educated them as well.

The oldest one of my cousins is pursuing a degree in medicine at a university in Minnesota. One day, he might go back to the underserved rural area of South Dakota, where he grew up, and practice medicine.

The recent changes in immigration are about my cousin and his wife in Wahoo, who have a citizen child whose dream is to play for the Nebraska Corn huskers. To make sure that their children are fed and well-educated, my cousin and his wife work long hours, sometimes more than 12 hours a day. They return home and are only able to spend a few hours with their children; they must go to bed early to do it all over again the next day. Every morning on their drive to work, their hope is that that day is not the last day they get to see their children.

The recent changes in immigration do not go far enough. As we leave it to the immature congress to try and get something done, let's hope they want to work on something for once. The president, much like the editors at the Journal Star, forgot about the people -- people whose dreams are that much closer to being realized by this simple change in enforcement of a broken system.

As soon as this program goes into effect, my cousins, my uncles and many others will breathe easier, knowing that they will return home to see their children one more day. Yes, the president made a mistake, but that mistake was not in acting alone politically. The mistake was in delaying relief for millions of people, thousands of families and families who can't wait to come out of the shadows and join the American Dream -- a dream that has been deferred for far too long.

Presidents have come and gone, and our broken immigration system is still just as broken, if not worse, than before. Waiting for Congress to act with the current leadership is like waiting for pigs to start flying. It's important to mention that every paycheck undocumented employees get includes an income tax and social security deduction, just like everyone else who is employed.

This tax money, just like everyone else's, goes to pay for the salaries of the very same people who have refused to act on immigration.

Finally, no matter how much fear is used to influence the opinions and actions of others, opponents of immigration will never be able to change the history of this nation. Anti-immigrant radicals will never erase the words underneath the Statue of Liberty, the very essence of this nation: "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free!"

Juan Gallegos is an immigrant rights activist who grew up in Hastings, Nebraska and now lives in Lincoln.