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FEATURED Q&A

Will Immigration Reform Happen in the U.S. This Year?



U.S. President Donald Trump has signaled openness to immigration reforms. A January pro-immigrant rally in Annapolis, Md., is pictured above. // Photo: Casa of Maryland.

Q Hours before a Feb. 28 speech to a joint session of Congress, U.S. President Donald Trump signaled openness during a luncheon with journalists to address legal status for immigrants who are in the United States illegally. What are the chances for immigration reform legislation to win approval this year in Congress? What political pressures will influence whether such a reform occurs? With Republicans in charge of the White House and both houses of Congress, what elements might comprise such a reform?

A Louis DeSipio, associate professor of political science and chair of Chicano/Latino studies at the University of California Irvine: "President Trump's recently announced willingness to support comprehensive immigration reform legislation that includes a path to legal status for unauthorized immigrants who have not committed serious crimes comes as a shock. Trump premised his candidacy on antipathy to immigrants and serious concerns about their potential to contribute to American society. Announcing his candidacy, he focused on Mexican immigrants whom he identified as drug smugglers, criminals and rapists. As an afterthought, he acknowledged that 'some, I assume, are good people.' His cabinet includes Attorney General Jeff Sessions, who has long opposed comprehensive immigration reform and has proposed reductions to legal immigration. With this history in mind, the seriousness of President Trump's commitment to comprehensive immigration reform must be questioned. Should President Trump pursue comprehensive immigration reform, he would not be able to count on the support of the majority of Republicans in Congress and would need to

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TODAY'S NEWS

POLITICAL

Death Toll Rises to 35 in Guatemala Youth Shelter Fire

In addition to those killed, dozens were injured in the blaze at the Virgen de Asunción home in the town of San José Pinula. Some of the victims may have been locked inside, one official said.

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BUSINESS

ICSID Overturns Order That Venezuela Pay Exxon \$1.4 Billion

Venezuela had been ordered to pay the oil company following then-President Hugo Chávez's nationalizations in the sector.

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ECONOMIC

Oversight Board Rejects Puerto Rico Governor's Debt Plan

The federal oversight board said Governor Ricardo Rosselló's initial plan to deal with the territory's massive debt is based on unrealistic economic growth projections and underestimates spending.

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Rosselló // File Photo: Commonwealth of Puerto Rico.

ECONOMIC NEWS

Oversight Board Rejects Puerto Rico Governor's Plan

A U.S. federal oversight board on Thursday rejected Puerto Rico Governor Ricardo Rosselló's initial plan for improving the commonwealth's finances, saying the proposal does not adequately cut spending and relies on projections that are overly optimistic, Bloomberg News reported. The plan that Rosselló released last

“The Proposed Plan is based on unrealistic projections of economic growth...”

— Financial Oversight and Management Board

week rejected the oversight board's austerity suggestions and relied largely on tax and cost-savings measures to begin addressing the U.S. territory's more than \$70 billion debt load. “The Proposed Plan is based on unrealistic projections of economic growth, substantially underestimates spending, and reflects overly optimistic revenue projections,” the board said Thursday in a letter to the governor, Bloomberg News reported. “The Proposed Plan does not provide a path to restructuring debt and pension obligations to reach a sustainable level, and ensuring funding of essential services for the people of Puerto Rico.” The board sent Rosselló the letter days before it is scheduled to review the plan. If the board finds that the governor is failing to take adequate steps to improve the island's finances, it can impose its own plan. Already, the oversight board has said the territory is underestimating spending by as much as \$585 million for the current fiscal year. In its letter to Rosselló, the board added that the territory must lower payroll costs by \$1.3 billion by 2021 and also impose larger cut-backs in areas including pensions and health care. The board has forecast that Puerto Rico's recession will last until 2022, and since taking

office in January, Rosselló has vowed to resist deep cuts to residents of Puerto Rico, where nearly half of residents live below the poverty line. The governor has also faced protests on college campuses after the board proposed cutting the budget of Puerto Rico's university system. The governor's office criticized the board's stance, saying it is relying on bad information. “The letter sent by the board is plagued by information that is incorrect,” said Elias Sánchez, the governor's representative to the board. “They are saying that we are understating expenses by \$585 million. That is preposterous.” The board asked Rosselló's administration to submit a revised proposal by Saturday, Bloomberg News reported. [Editor's note: See [Q&A](#) on Rosselló's plan in Thursday's Advisor.]

TPP Countries to Seek New Deal in Chile Meeting

Countries that had signed up to participate in the failed Trans-Pacific Partnership, or TPP, trade agreement, as well as China and South Korea, will meet in Chile next week with the goal of searching for another way to achieve a regional trade deal, Chile's head of international trade, Paulina Nazal, told Reuters Wednesday. The meeting will be the group's first since



Nazal // File Photo: Chilean Government.

U.S. President Donald Trump decided to pull the United States out of the deal in January. Nazal said Chile's first objective was to get the remaining participating states, plus China and South Korea, to agree to come together, and that the next objective will be to seek commitments from the countries to come to

NEWS BRIEFS

Death Toll Rises to 35 in Guatemala Youth Shelter Fire

The death toll rose to 35 on Thursday following a fire the day before at a home for troubled youths southeast of Guatemala City, the Associated Press reported. The blaze reportedly broke out when some of the residents set fire to a mattress following an escape attempt at the overcrowded shelter. A Guatemalan human rights official said Thursday that some of the victims may have been unable to escape because they had been locked inside, The New York Times reported.

Bolivia Doubles Amount of Land That Can Be Used to Grow Coca

The Bolivian government has doubled the amount of land that can be legally used to grow coca plants, a main ingredient of cocaine, and which has been consumed in indigenous communities in the Andes for centuries, Fox News reported Thursday. Bolivian President Evo Morales, himself a former coca grower, on Wednesday signed a bill that allows for 54,000 acres of land in Bolivia to be used for coca farming, up from 29,000 under the previous legislation. Bolivia is the world's third-largest cocaine producer, after Colombia and Peru.

SunPower Puts Chilean Solar Plant Up for Sale

SunPower, an energy company majority-owned by French energy company Total, has put the 100-megawatt El Pelicano solar plant in Chile up for sale, according to two people with knowledge of the process, Reuters reported Thursday. The plant is currently under construction and is set to be completed next year. The sources did not say what SunPower's target price would be for El Pelicano, but the project was originally received \$222 million in funding from banks in Chile, Asia and Europe.

FEATURED Q&A / Continued from page 1

pass legislation based largely on the votes of Democrats. This is a legislative strategy that Republican congressional leaders have resisted. Republicans, particularly Republicans in the House, have blocked debate on comprehensive immigration legislation since 2006. It is unlikely that strong leadership from President Trump could sway many congressional Republicans. Classic nativism on the part of many members certainly explains some of the Republican opposition, but for many, this antipathy to immigrants is reinforced by fears of facing single-issue anti-immigration reform challengers in Republican primaries. President Trump's reported empathy toward unauthorized immigrants, if real, will be unlikely to end the congressional deadlock on immigration reform."

A **Dan Stein, president of the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) in Washington:** "For bipartisan immigration reform to pass in this Congress, we need compromise on both sides of the aisle. The debate is now polarized. The Democrats' public positions today—reflexively hostile to immigration enforcement—are unrecognizable from those of the 20th Century. It's base has changed. The Republican Party hasn't changed: A split between its base and Wall Street means tension between border security and cheaper labor. Nevertheless, President Trump made big promises to the base during the campaign. He has a mandate to transcend this intra-party divide. His willingness to informally float out a compromise notion on legalization (or amnesty) for Democrats reflects both his political strength and his negotiating prowess. He has held back on enforcing laws against the so-called 'Dreamers' to provide Democrats an incentive to come to the negotiating table. Results so far? The cold shoulder from the opposition party. Democrats have two choices. Continue using the immigration issue to cynically produce imagined loyalty from Hispanic voters, or actually move back

to the center and support responsible immigration law enforcement. All the evidence is that a party led by Senator Chuck Schumer sees no advantage in meeting Trump in the middle. Game over. Any immigration bills

“All the evidence is that a party led by Senator Chuck Schumer sees no advantage in meeting Trump in the middle.”

— Dan Stein

that do pass—and we could even see an omnibus Trump-sponsored package, would have to pass with only a handful of Democratic votes. It would vindicate many of Trump's campaign promises and focus on enforcement and limiting unskilled immigration."

A **Karen A. Woodrow-Lafield, research professor and faculty associate at the Maryland Population Research Center at the University of Maryland, College Park:** "The most recent effort at comprehensive immigration reform was by a bipartisan group of senators with Senate passage of the 2013 Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act, S. 744. That bill spelled out alternative pathways to legal status based on length of unauthorized residence and other criteria, and increased border patrol agents, plus many other proposals. Under S. 744, the likely fiscal impact of those additional workers paying taxes would have been positive for financing Social Security programs and could have reduced the federal budget deficit. The House counterpart, H.R. 15, stalled without a vote. Meanwhile, unauthorized migration from Mexico was diminishing, and most unauthorized residents are now believed to have lived here for at least five to 10 years. The popular vote in the presidential election was for Hillary

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additional meetings and evaluate their options moving forward. "The objective is to confirm if the strategy of growth and openness of recent years is what we believe to be correct," she said. "Do we need to include other issues? Do we need to implement policies that complement the opening of trade or not?" China is likely to be the new leader of the talks now that the United States has dropped out of the pact, and the meeting next week is a sign that talks may be moving forward despite the setback in January. Though it is premature to say what a future trade agreement may look like, Nazal said some options including basing the new TPP on similar agreements, such as the Pacific Alliance or the proposed Southeast Asian-backed Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, known as RCEP.

BUSINESS NEWS

ICSID Overturns Order That Venezuela Pay Exxon \$1.4 Billion

The World Bank's International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes, or ICSID, on Thursday overturned a previous ruling that had ordered Venezuela to pay U.S.-based multinational oil company ExxonMobil \$1.4 billion in damages, a lawyer for the Venezuelan government said, Reuters reported. The case at ICSID came as a result of late President Hugo Chávez's nationalizations of the oil sector, in addition to takeovers in the electricity, telecoms, metal and agricultural sectors during his presidency. The panel said "portions of the award," totaled at \$1.6 billion, were annulled, though it did not give specific details of the figures. The annulment of certain aspects of the award will come as welcome news to the cash-strapped nation, which is facing heavy foreign debt payments and a crippling economic recession. A spokesman for ExxonMobil, Todd Spitler, did not confirm the financial details of the new ruling, but said the company "will continue to evaluate its legal rights and determine next steps."

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Clinton, who supported comprehensive immigration reform, including a pathway to full and equal citizenship. The current administration's emphasis is on increasing deportations, building walls and supporting trade protectionism. For long-overdue immigration reform, this Congress should build upon the work of the 113th Congress. Drawing from National Academy of Sciences studies to assess the integration of immigrants (2015) and the economic and fiscal consequences of immigration (2016) and the Georgetown Institute for the Study of International Migration's Immigration Policy and Reform Project (2013-2015), policymaking can be evidence-based and move forward with bipartisan leadership. Certain urban states supported Clinton and comprehensive immigration reform, having enacted sanctuary or inclusionary policies, and are likely to be adversely affected by the social and economic fallout of heightened enforcement, specifically in California, New York, New Jersey and Illinois. Stories abound of detained individuals who were living as active members of communities, in

families with U.S.-born children, in marriages to naturalized and U.S.-born citizens, and as productive workers in businesses. Fearful parents are arranging guardianship. In the

“The current administration's emphasis is on increasing deportations, building walls and supporting trade protectionism.”

— Karen A. Woodrow-Lafield

Central Valley of California, farm managers are concerned about a diminished agricultural workforce. Priority should be given to unifying across states and valuing U.S. relations with neighbors and trading partners in North America.”

The Advisor welcomes comments on its Q&A section. Readers can write editor Gene Kuleta at genekuleta@thedialogue.org.

JOB POSTINGS

EDITOR'S NOTE: We are pleased to share Latin America-related job postings that companies reading the Advisor and others have posted recently.

Liberty Mutual: Vice President of International Strategy and Operations, Boston

Walmart: Senior Manager, Latin America Government Affairs, Bentonville, Ark.

VICE: Regional Head of Content for Latin America, Brooklyn, N.Y.

AECOM: Latin America Regional Leader, Miami

Center for Global Development: Research Assistant, Financial Regulation and Inclusion and International Macroeconomics, Washington

Johns Hopkins University: Assistant Director of Development for Latin America, Baltimore

Inter-American Dialogue: Spanish Speaking Staff Accountant, Washington and Guatemala

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