



It's a Matter of Unity, It's a Matter of Strength

"[L]et us go forward together, and haply we shall give honor to one another, or another to us."
—*The Iliad*, by Homer

WITHIN A FEW YEARS, a sea of change will occur in immigration law. There can be no doubt of that. Revisions to the law are likely to be as dramatic as the changes wrought by the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA) and the Immigration Act of 1990 (IMMACT 90), and may even rival the fundamental Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952.

For several years, AILA has heralded the necessary components of successful legislation: Comprehensive immigration reform must include earned adjustment for those living and working in the United States and contributing to our economy; a future-flow visa program to allow essential workers to enter the country legally; sufficient additional visas to reduce backlogs in family-based immigration; and elimination of the delays in employment-based immigration.

Examining Our Goal

Through the odd and unexpected prism of "national security" comes the admission that millions of undocumented workers contribute to our economy and must be afforded legal status. In a time of intense partisanship in Congress, both Republicans and Democrats have acknowledged the need for comprehensive immigration reform, and have introduced competing bills aimed at particular constituencies.

Political and lobbying groups from all perspectives, think tanks, nonprofit agencies, and minority groups flood the media with reports and analysis of congressional proposals and their possible effects on native-born Americans and noncitizens. Restrictionists, of course, spread xenophobia by preying on economic insecurity.

Confusion reigns in the cacophony of voices.

Examining Our Mission

In this turmoil, AILA, through its luminous history and current membership, stands alone with expertise on every aspect of immigration law. AILA has been the bar association for providing representation of non-citizens and immigrants since its founding in 1946. We are practicing attorneys using the immigration laws daily to reunite families, to assist businesses of all sizes to employ needed workers, to secure admission of those needing asylum, and to prevent removal of aliens deserving to stay.

While members of AILA have different practice areas, come from varied backgrounds, and surely have different opinions on particular aspects of immigration law, we do not represent the government, and we never sit on the opposite side of a counsel table in immigration court. When our Board of Governors debates issues regarding immigration reform, we share a wealth of experience, unfettered by fear of reprisals from supervisors for standing up for immigrants or calling a government agency to task.

Unlike open bar associations, our positions are not diluted by having government employees in our membership. When AILA advocates for certain measures in Congress, our knowledge of the law and presentation of "real-life" experiences with the agencies is unchallenged. AILA is consistently invited to testify before Congress because we know what works, what doesn't, and what ripple effects could flow from short-sighted measures.

Our clarity of mission engenders credibility.

Examining Our Purpose

Today, noncitizens desperately need our services and can benefit from our exclusive membership perhaps more than at

any other time in our history. Merely on the basis of a presidential announcement, prior to the introduction—let alone passage—of any legislation, notarios already are advertising immigration services for "the new amnesty" and stealing from the unsuspecting. Now, we must reach out to our clients and our communities and set the record straight.

And when the proposals come to fruition, we must mobilize our members to provide informed representation, guiding those who will benefit from the law and warning those who may be harmed by it. With the deep divisions in Congress, virtually any outcome is possible, and the latter may outnumber the former. If so, AILA will continue the fight for comprehensive, workable immigration reform for years to come.

But we are poised for fundamental change. The implementation of IRCA and IMMACT 90 were exhilarating times in the immigration bar. In those pre-AILA InfoNet days, AILA immediately organized seminars on the new laws around the country. Experienced members taught other members the brave new world of immigration practice. Chapters worked with voluntary agencies, unions, and community groups to inform potential immigrants of the actual reach of the law and the steps that apply.

Members appeared in innumerable community meetings to provide correct information on the laws. Rumors abounded then as well, and notarios profited at the expense of unwitting noncitizens. AILA is again being called upon to marshal its resources from its National Office, through its chapters, and with individual members to inform the public and counter those who would exploit vulnerable noncitizens.

Our unity and single purpose is our strength.

AILA President **Palma R. Yanni** practices immigration law in Washington, D.C.