

# Glastonbury group hosts conversation on immigration

By STEVE SMITH HARTFORD COURANT FEBRUARY 4, 2021



Alan Dornan, an 81-year-old activist from Wethersfield, has protested every day for three years.

GLASTONBURY — In the light of President Joe Biden’s executive orders aimed at repealing the Donald Trump-era anti-immigration policies, speakers presented their hopes for the future of immigrants, during a conversation hosted by the Glastonbury Martin Luther King Community Initiative, on Jan. 25.

“Anyone who lives within the United States can never be considered an outsider anywhere within its bounds,” said Jon Bauer, director of the Asylum and Human Rights Clinic at UConn School of Law and the conversation’s moderator.

Bauer was quoting Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and said that pertains to today, because undocumented people from other countries are still treated as outsiders, even though 11 million of them live, work, and contribute to the economy in the United States.

Immigration attorney Dana Bucin explained the different paths people can take to become citizens of the United States, and how they are really limited. Business and employment ties, family of current citizens (spouse and children), by marriage, or those seeking asylum or refugee status, or humanitarian grounds are the most common ways. The diversity visa lottery, limited to a 50,000 per year quota, is another way.

“There is no such thing as jumping directly to citizenship,” Bucin said. “Sometimes it’s a very long and arduous journey.”

People sponsored by an employer can get a green card, enabling them to legally live and work in the United States. After three to five years, green card holders can apply for citizenship.

However, there is a cap of 65,000 green card-to-citizenship graduations per year for people holding bachelor degrees, plus another 20,000 for those with advanced degrees.

“The tragedy is that there are simply not enough visa numbers to serve our need for labor at the professional level,” she said, adding that over the past several years, more applications have come in over the first five days than there are available spots each year.

“This signals a misalignment between the need we have for these folks, and the availability of visas for them,” Bucin said, adding that those with advanced degrees, including scientists and researchers, were being seen as a threat under the previous administration, but it’s precisely those people who are a benefit to have in this country.

Dr. Demetrios Giannaros, who immigrated from Greece at the age of 14 with his family, is a retired professor of economics, public policy, public finance, international business, economic forecasting, and global financial markets at the University of Hartford, Suffolk University, and Boston University, and a former state representative. He explained how immigrants have \$1.3 trillion dollars of

buying power and are integral to the United States economy, including 3.5 million who are entrepreneurs.

“We have people who help us grow our food, and serve us at restaurants, but we also have people in medicine, in science, in engineering, and in different areas of our lives,” he said, adding that the CEOs of American companies Pfizer and Moderna are both immigrants, as is Katalin Karikó, a Hungarian scientist whose research of mRNA paved the way for the vaccines.

“She’s saving the world, through Pfizer,” Giannaros said, also mentioning other immigrants such as Tesla founder Elon Musk from South Africa, YouTube founder Steve Chan from Taiwan, and Sergey Brin, the Russian-born founder of Google.

“This anti-immigrant sentiment that we had over the last four years... is nonsense from an economic point of view, and makes no sense whatsoever, other than feeding hatred,” Giannaros said.

Chris George, director of Integrated Refugee & Immigrant Services (IRIS), said that there are currently 26 million people in the world who are refugees, most of whom live for many years in limbo, such as in refugee camps. Refugees seeking to come to the United States go through an extremely rigorous vetting process - the toughest in the world - which takes approximately two to three years.

George said that the United States’ policies toward immigrants over the past four years were not based on factual data, and has caused resettlement numbers to decline, from 85,000 in 2016, 50,000 in 2017 and only 11,000 in 2020.

“A lot of the policies of the Trump administration were based on misinformation... or lies,” George said. “There was this lie being spread that the vast majority of asylum-seeking families who were allowed to come into the United States and given a court date were not showing up, and that’s not true.”

The Biden administration, he said, is encouraging more hope with more sensible policies.

“Fortunately, our new administration really believes in this historic tradition of welcoming persecuted people from all over the world and helping them start new lives,” George said. “It makes sense to release asylum-seekers into the United States, let them stay with friends or relatives, and then show up in court to make

their case, not detain them forever in a desert prison, costing the U.S. government \$300 per day, per person.”

Alan Dornan, an 81-year-old activist from Wethersfield, has protested every day for three years, after being moved by watching senate hearings about a rider giving citizenship to “dreamers” - children of undocumented immigrants - and realizing nothing would come of it.

“I heard an angry voice from deep within my soul,” Dornan said, adding that he soon decided to walk each day, take part in other protests, and organize group walks, as ways of advocating for his “immigrant sisters and brothers.”

As his scoliosis and spinal stenosis worsened, he began daily sit-ins on a corner near his home.

Dornan, who has a large number of social media followers, posted a photo of himself with an undocumented immigrant, but was warned that he may be putting his friend in danger of being detained by ICE, which gave him a deeper realization of the problem.

“That was my first inkling of the dangerous and stressful living circumstances which immigrants endure every day of their lives,” Dornan said. “I wish I could tell you that life got better for immigrants during the next three years, but, to the contrary, they have been demonized and terrorized by a racist administration, while good Americans too often looked away. Hopefully, that is now in the process of being changed.”