News

Romando, a migrant from Peru seeking asylum in the United States, plays a hand-clapping ga

Romando, a migrant from Peru seeking asylum in the United States, plays a hand-clapping game with his daughter Alexa, 7, as they stand in line waiting to be processed in Roma, Texas, Feb. 28, 2022. (CNS photo/Adrees Latif, Reuters)



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Representatives from the business sector, faith groups and grassroots organizations that support immigration reform sent Congress a letter March 2, a day after President Biden's first State of the Union address, urging lawmakers to act on immigration because "simply put, the system is broken."

"Millions of workers, many of whom were indispensable to America's COVID-19 response, are living in legal jeopardy. Apprehensions at the southern border are at historic highs. Employers are also struggling to find workers to fill jobs in many

industries," said the letter from the Alliance for a New Immigration Consensus.

The coalition with members of at least 30 organizations, including the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Migration, is hoping to build bipartisan support to salvage efforts that would bring legal relief for some, if not all, of the almost 11 million people who are in the country without permission.

But coalition members also seemed to understand that it was a tall order given the political divisions in Congress.

"I think we've recognized ... that comprehensive immigration reform, one big package, doesn't have much opportunity" to pass in this Congress, Rick Naerebout, CEO of Idaho Dairymen's Association, said in a March 2 Zoom call organized by the coalition.

But they urged Congress to find a solution and said they would enlist coalition members to visit Capitol Hill and talk to lawmakers.

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Efforts seem to be focused on getting relief for Dreamers, young adults brought into the country illegally as children; beneficiaries of Temporary Protected Status; and, agricultural workers and others who have kept the country operating during the pandemic.

From the faith perspective, Auxiliary Bishop Mario E. Dorsonville of Washington, the USCCB's migration committee chairman, said the church seeks reform because it "recognizes the God-given dignity of every single person in our nation, citizens and noncitizens."

The church would continue to advocate for them, he said, and urged both political parties to put differences aside and "work together to create an immigration system that is more sustainable, more humane and more in line with our country's limitless potential."

He spoke of plans to gather a group of bishops to visit Capitol Hill in late April.

Jon Baselice, vice president of immigration policy at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, said that "elected officials cannot continue to forgo the opportunities that are before them: to fix our nation's broken immigration system."

The majority of the U.S. public wants to see something done, he said.

Despite political rhetoric, a Public Religion Research Institute survey in February found that a majority of Americans -- six in 10, or 62% -- "support offering immigrants living in the U.S. illegally a way to become citizens, provided they meet certain requirements."

Naerebout, of the Dairymen's Association, said Congress has the ability to find a solution but "it takes courage." In his corner of the world, in Idaho, "we are tired of lip service. ... We want action," he said.

When it comes to the agriculture industry, something needs to be done to protect those whose work is in important to the nation's food supply, he said.

"The vast majority of the food produced in the United States is produced on the shoulders of foreign-born workers," he said.

Walter Kim, president of the National Association of Evangelicals, said his organization's interest in the immigration issue is tied to Jesus' experience as a refugee.

"Jesus himself experienced life as refugee, escaping political oppression and persecution," Kim said.

But Scripture isn't the only reason to advocate for migrants, Kim said. Christians are called to provide protection or live in solidarity with the vulnerable, he said, because that's what Christ did.

Likewise, Bishop Dorsonville said the Catholic Church helps migrants because "it is his face we see in Dreamers, undocumented agricultural workers and other immigrants."