



HAPpenings !

HISPANIC AFFAIRS PROJECT

We are an organization dedicated to the development of leadership, community organizing, and the provision of key services for the integration of the western Colorado community.

March 2016

Western Colorado Organizes for the Legislative Session

This past February 13th, 40 leaders from Western Slope communities--including representatives of the organizations Western Colorado Congress (WCC), Organizing for Action (OFA), Western Slope Anti Trafficking (WSAT), and Compañeros-Durango--participated in a regional meeting of the Colorado Immigrant Rights Coalition (CIRC) to create a plan of support for legislative proposals we hope to win at the state capitol in 2016.

The main pro-immigrant legislative proposals include a change to the existing driver licenses law and the introduction of the IMPACT (Improving and Maintaining Protections, Accountability, and Community Trust) bill, while another part of the day involved studying the implementation of DAPA and extended DACA, which is currently pending review by the Supreme Court. The DAPA administrative measure would help working parents who have been in the country since January 1, 2010 receive a work permit and protection against deportation if they have children with legal status.

Brendan Greene, Campaign Director for CIRC, stated that “these proposals have the support of state representatives and senators from both parties, of prosecutors, of the Colorado Sheriffs Association and police departments. And it has been demonstrated that these proposals would improve public safety, help guarantee constitutional rights, save state funds and even augment collection of related state and federal fees.”

Rick Baer, coordinator for OFA-Grand Junction spoke about proposals relating to health care reform, increasing the minimum wage, and climate change, among other topics. He also recalled the mobilization of 2008 and 2012 to pass important initiatives and invited the community to try for the same type of impact this year. By the end of the day we had agreed to unify our work and support each others' organizations.

The meeting ended with scheduling visits with legislators in coordination with our allied groups in the state. The next regional meeting with the theme “Get Out to Vote” will be April 23 in Montrose.



The Regional Campaigns of HAP

HAP, through its BIA-certified immigration legal assistance program, has launched a campaign to reach residents eligible to become US citizens. “It is a priority that our neighbors and family members who are eligible for citizenship apply as soon as possible, and HAP will be helping with the applications,” said Lourdes Reyes, leader of the Grand Junction Committee.



Photo: Volunteers help register new voters. HAP and OFA-Grand Junction work together in the **campaign to ensure that our communities will be ready to vote in the next elections.**

Another campaign is education to prevent FRAUD in immigration cases, selling of driver license appointments, loan and labor frauds, etc. Nicole Ruiz, director of the HAP BIA program said, “Everyday we encounter cases of people who have suffered fraud with their immigration applications at the hands of businesses and notaries that offer this service. Some people have paid as much as \$2,000 for a service that was never received or that actually ruined their immigration record.” She continued, “We are coordinating with immigration lawyers to document such cases and we will support a state legislative proposal to criminalize fraud and the unauthorized practice of immigration law.” Practicing immigration law without a license is already a crime, but our proposed bill would allow the prosecution of the crime based on the documentation of the facts instead of requiring the testimony of the victims. Many people have been defrauded but are afraid to testify. Fraud has also been committed by some immigration

attorneys who have taking advantage of the climate of fear and lack of information in the immigrant community. The American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA-CO) and the Colorado Bar Association (COBAR) support the proposed legislation. “This fraud has been a true nightmare for many families,” Ruiz added.

Photo below: Members of the committees familiarize themselves with the documents families should collect to be prepared to apply for DAPA and train themselves to avoid immigration fraud.



Below: Naturalization Ceremony at the National Monument in Mesa County. HAP is one of the agencies collaborating with the Court and USCIS to celebrate naturalization days when people officially become citizens.



During the regional meeting, we had a visit from David Romero, Mayor of Montrose, who welcomed the attendees. He spoke about his personal experiences and expressed appreciation for HAP's work for integration. “My priority is working with all groups in the community without exception,” he said. Under Romero's term as mayor, the city has made proclamations recognizing the contributions of immigrants and the importance of creating welcoming communities.

The Members of HAP



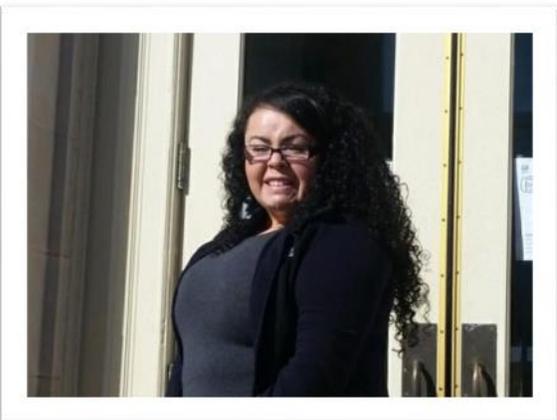
Path to Citizenship

“My name is Roxana Gonzalez and I live in Grand Junction. I was born in Jalisco, Mexico and I came to the United States in 2008 through the visa my father obtained, so we could come join him and all live together. Right now I work as a quality inspector at an excellent company that produces fishing line.

With the legal help of HAP and their legal assistance program, I sent my application for citizenship in November and on February 29th, I had my final interview, and now I’m waiting for the date of my naturalization and citizenship ceremony. My experience with the application was very positive. As is very common, I was frightened by the 27 page document and by the required exams. I’m very grateful to HAP and to USCIS. The immigration officials were very nice and helped me along the way in my path to become a citizen.

This country has given me a lot and I have the obligation to give back, to register to vote and participate in the political system. I want to encourage all those that are eligible to apply and not to be afraid. It’s a step we should all take to better serve our country”.

Roxana is already helping other citizenship applicants to prepare for their civics test.



My name is Pedro Blanco. I live in Olathe and I have 20 years working in agriculture. This type of work is very hard and most of us who work in the fields are immigrants. I have heard the supervisors say that we work very fast and are willing and able to work long hours. It is unfortunate that in these political campaigns some candidates are saying bad things about immigrants, and that is because they don't know us. From my personal experience I can say that we do not take jobs from citizens, nor do we come to use government services. Undocumented people do not even qualify for public benefits.

I am a member of HAP and sharing our story is very important to demonstrate who we are and the contributions we make to this country which we love and which is our home.

Photograph above: Pedro and his family during the celebration of the International Day of the Migrant.

Below: Members of the Montrose HAP Committee during a training about social determinants of health in Montrose, in coordination with Live Well Montrose -Olathe. We are preparing a new series of trainings to start in March



Labor Trafficking and Temporary Worker Visas

Telluride, February 5:

“My name is Cesar Chicana. I am from Peru and came to the United States with a J1 Visa that is for students that come to work temporarily in some tourist industries here. When we arrived, they took us to an apartment and told us that 13 people, among them men and women, would live there and each one would pay \$600. Because it was small, we asked if we might look for another place to rent and they told us that if we left the apartment we would lose our jobs, and if we lost our jobs, we would also lose the apartment. In the contract there was no mention of this. I was laid-off because there was little work and, of course, they threw me out of the apartment. I slept for 5 days in the laundry-room and a Peruvian family found me and gave me a room. Afterwards I was able to find another job for the rest of the season. I have asked that they return the deposit that I had given for the apartment and they don't want to return my money.”

Meeker January 18:

An interview with a shepherd:

“What salary are you receiving?”

“\$750.”

“Do you realize that your salary should be \$1,206 per month as of November 16, 2015?”

“No, we didn't.”

“Hasn't your employer told you anything about this?”

“No, only that those working with cattle are making that salary, but not us.”

“Do you want help from a lawyer so you can receive your salary as the law mandates?”

“We need to think about it. We don't want problems with the boss. You understand, we are completely dependent on them and if they found out, we'd really be in trouble.”

Gypsum, March 2:

“My name is Monserrat Mendoza and I am calling you for help. I met two Peruvian workers on a ranch that work with sheep. They weren't being given enough clothing or food for the winter. They weren't being paid their wages and, to top it off, their boss hit one of them. [The two herders] fled to Utah. I am asking you for help so they receive a visit and to see if there is something that can be done to help them. . .”

The HAP team is already in touch with these workers. They don't know the address where they are located but we hope to visit them and assist them in their rights.



The Hispanic Affairs Project, in the name of all the workers that are members of the organization, is proceeding with a suit against the Department of Labor (DOL) for the irregularities that have been repeated for many years. We believe that a means to protect the rights of the workers is to cancel the H2A visa and grant the workers residence status. Our argument rests on the fact that the workers reside in the United States. They live in our country for three consecutive years and return to their home countries for 2-3 months and then return to repeat the same cycle. The lack of participation by the workers and of public awareness has allowed abuses that are considered labor trafficking in developed countries. Our country should be exemplary in the way it cares for its migrant workers



Red de Colorado para Combatir el Trafico Humano/Colorado Network to End Human Trafficking (CoNEHT) 1-866 / 455-5075

Developing New Leaders

With support from Western Colorado Congress (WCC) we've now completed the second part of the Principles of Community Organizing (POCO) training focused on organizing successful meetings and campaigns. 40 members, among Latinos and Anglos, came together to build capacity within our community. Within HAP we are applying what we've learned, facilitating neighborhood meetings and contacting elected officials to advocate for the issues that are important to our community.



Working within the committees

In an attempt to effectively share information and create spaces for participation, the Grand Junction, Montrose and Gunnison committees are organizing monthly informational sessions. In 2015, more than 1,300 people attended one or multiple sessions covering different topics of interest.

Victor Encarnacion said, "This has been a great opportunity to connect public institutions and organizations with the immigrant community and has been a way for each to learn about the other. Through these sessions we're promoting trust within the community in order to create safer communities. For example, the participation of our local law enforcement, district attorneys, elected officials, and Colorado DMV officials has created the sense that minority groups are being considered within local politics, and that we too benefit from the same constitutional rights regardless of immigration status or whether we have limited English proficiency. Not only do we learn something new, but with these new connections we always leave with the understanding that we're working together towards what's good for everyone."



In this month in which we celebrate the life of Cesar Chavez, please consider a donation to HAP in honor of the migrant workers and to help us continue our campaign for new labor regulations for sheepherders.

Checks can be made out to **Hispanic Affairs Project** or online donations are accepted at www.hapgj.org

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Return Service Requested