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Hispanics in the Illinois Valley react to Trump's election with hope and worry

Kevin Solari Nov 22, 2016

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Aurora Medina of Mendota pauses while recalling negative post-election incidents her children have encountered at school.

The day after the presidential election, Pilar Solis of Peru said a boy approached her daughter at school.

"He said, 'You need to go to Mexico,'" Solis said.

She explained to her daughter that wasn't true. "I said, 'You were born here. You don't need to listen (to the boy).'"

That same day, Aurora Medina of Mendota said, one of her sons came home from school and told her kids in school were "building a wall." Medina works with Illinois Valley Services and with members of the Hispanic community in the Illinois Valley.

"There are worries about how people will react," Medina said. The 2016 presidential campaign "created a lot of hate after so much progress."

After Republican candidate Donald Trump was elected president Nov. 8, many immigrants in the Illinois Valley had to take stock of promises he made during the campaign, such as the border wall and increased deportations. Once hypotheticals, the president-elect now has the power to carry out those pledges.

In his first televised interview, less than a week after the election, Trump doubled down, saying he would deport as many as 3 million people illegally in the United States his first day, but only focus on those with criminal records.

Beyond deportation, however, are incidents like those described above. The Southern Poverty Law Center, which tracks hate crimes and hate groups nationwide, said there were more than 225 reported hate crimes it classified as "anti-immigrant" since Nov. 8.

But it doesn't have to take action to have a negative impact.

"The day after the election I went to Wal-Mart. I felt weird because all of the people looked at me weird. It doesn't feel good. I think white people feel superior to us and that's not good," said Carolina Luna of Spring Valley. "This is a country for opportunities for all people."

Luna is a citizen, born in the United States but raised in Mexico, She is not at risk for deportation.

Others are not so lucky.

Un-Deferred Action

Trump campaigned by opposing two "deferred action" programs that allow people in the country illegally to live and work in the open without concern of deportation. One is for children and one for parents.

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals is a program that President Obama attempted to expand in 2014 before a federal court in Texas blocked his executive order. That court also blocked the implementation of the program for parents.

DACA allows people who were brought to the United States as children by their parents to register and delay any removal action by immigration services for two years. It can be renewed.

"Deferred action does not provide lawful status," according to United States Citizen and Immigration Services.

Applicants need to meet seven guidelines to qualify for deferred action, including being brought to the United States before their 16th birthday, be in school or have received certification of completing high school or GED, and have not been convicted of felonies, significant misdemeanors or otherwise pose a threat to national security.

DACA participants need to register with immigration services to participate. Many are concerned that that information, instead of safeguarding their status, could now be used to deport them.

The NewsTribune spoke to one man in the country on deferred action who wished to remain anonymous for the safety of his family. He is concerned his family will be separated if Trump's plans for mass deportation were carried out.

He was born in Mexico and brought to the United States when he was 5. He is registered with the government and working three jobs legally to pay for school. His younger brother was born in America and is a citizen.

If his family is sent back to Mexico, his brother would remain in the United States in foster care, he said. He said they are planning for both possibilities: they are selling property to have money in case they are deported, but he is also continuing his plans for the future.

"My dreams won't be crushed because of a bully," he said.

It's not just the possible threats to homes and families that have some worried. Alma Herrera of Mexico City and Oglesby is concerned for an economic reason.

Her daughters go to school in the Illinois Valley and Herrera comes to the country on a tourist visa but lives and works in Mexico. Trump's election caused the Mexican peso's value to plunge against the dollar, meaning Herrera's money will not go as far in the United States.

Maricela Garcia of DePue isn't concerned because she thinks the president-elect's plans are unreasonable.

"You can't send millions of people back to Mexico. There are so many here," she said. "We're here to live a better life, not cause harm as everybody assumes … My family came here to give us something better."

In May, the American Action Forum published a report saying it could cost up to $300 billion to deport the estimated 12 million people in the country illegally.

Melissa Serrano of DePue said she had not experienced any negative treatment herself, but was concerned for family members who could be sent back to Mexico, especially a brother-in-law who would not have any family to return to in Mexico, and whose wife and kids are in the United States.

But while there are worries caused by the uncertainty, some are expressing hope.

"I think it will bring us closer in a way," said Aseret Loveland, one of the faculty advisers to Illinois Valley Community College's Hispanic Leadership Team. "We can pull together and influence in our community instead of trying to change the world … Good things will come out."

Kevin Solari can be reached at (815) 220-6931 or countyreporter@newstrib.com. Follow him on Twitter @NT_County.

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