

UniteFamilies

a movement to unite lawful US permanent residents with their families

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Welcome to the fourth issue of the *UniteFamilies.org* newsletter. Three months have passed since our previous issue and a lot of events have taken place. We start with an update on the status of the immigration reform legislation. We are pleased to announce that we hired Paul Donnelly as our strategic consultant to help us reach the media and lawmakers. This was possible only because of generous donations from over 120 of our members and active participation of our core group. Paul has written a special column for this newsletter that outlines strategies that everyone should follow in order to reach our goals. You will also find the most recent statistics on our membership, our petition drive, and F2A cutoff dates. This summer is a crucial time when we can still influence Congress and have it remedy the cruel injustice to which LPR spouses and children are subjected now. There is a truly realistic hope for that. We have already achieved a lot but we need money to support our activities and we ask you to donate generously.

Immigration Reform Update

Many *UniteFamilies.org* members are keenly following the course that immigration reform is

taking. After debating for several months, the Senate passed the Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act (S. 2611) on May 25, 2006. This bill has to be reconciled with H.R. 4437 passed by the House of Representatives last December. In June, several House leaders announced that they would hold public hearings across the country to examine the bill passed by the Senate. These hearings will take place in July and August. The House is expected to resume its work on the legislation in September.

With respect to the spouses and minor children of legal permanent residents (LPRs), the present bill (S. 2611) increases the number of available visas from the current 88,000 to about 185,000. *UniteFamilies.org* believes that this increase is no more than a temporary band-aid. The best solution would be the ‘immediate relative’ language that was proposed in the original Hagel/Martinez amendment at the start of the Senate debate. It would reclassify the spouses and children of LPRs as immediate relatives, thus exempting them from annual caps on immigrant visas. This amendment was later substituted by the family-backlog reduction provisions of the McCain/Kennedy bill.

Paul Donnelly joins *UniteFamilies.org*

Everyone in our group was aware of and agreed to the fact that we needed an advisor who could make our voices be heard in the media and Congress. Last spring, our core group spent a lot of time and effort in finding that person. And, we hired Paul Donnelly. Paul is a political and media consultant with more than 25 years

of experience with the immigration debate in the Senate and House of Representatives, including a key staff role in the passage of the last permanent increase in annual immigration.

A few members from the core group worked with him on a private basis for the months of March and April. He did a great job talking to the staff of several Senators and with Senators directly. In particular, he was able to reach Senators Frist (R-TN), Specter (R-PA), Clinton (D-NY), and Hagel (R-NE). Paul also contacted several religious organizations. He was readily accessible to us and provided us with useful strategies to achieve the goal of *UniteFamilies.org*. *UniteFamilies.org* hired him on a monthly basis starting in May.

A partial list of his achievements includes:

- Played a role in having the immediate relative provision added to the Hagel/Martinez amendment. Unfortunately, it was later substituted by the McCain/Kennedy provisions, i.e., by an increase in the number of visas.
- Reached Senator Clinton's office and proposed a V-visa amendment.
- Brought our problem to the attention of Jeff Jacoby of the Boston Globe and that resulted in an article about family separation.
- Worked with Sea Coast Online reporter Beth LaMontagne on an article about family separation.
- Wrote an article for the NewsIndia-Times urging Asian Indians in America to stand up for their fellow country men and women who are suffering from the problem of family separation.
- Arranged an interview of Naveen Yeddula, one of our affected members, by WUSA TV 9 in Washington, D.C.
- Worked with Suzanne Gamboa of the Associated Press on an article highlighting long delays faced by spouses of LPRs. This article was published by several newspapers, both in English and Spanish.

UniteFamilies.org is looking forward to continue working with Paul as his help and advice have been of great importance to us. However, his support and all activities depend on member donations. We are severely short of funds and cannot pay Paul for the next month. We appeal to all our readers to donate generously.

If you donate more than \$100, you will be added to a special Yahoo group called *unitefamilies-consult*, where Paul Donnelly is a member. He'll give you advice on strategy and report on activity in Congress. You can also ask him questions.

Finally, please read his article.

Media Coverage

The efforts of our members and Paul Donnelly resulted in a significant increase in media coverage of the family separation issue. We have collected all the stories at our web site. Here is a brief account of all the coverage that we received:

- Article in the North American edition of the Indian Express.
- Article in the Boston Globe. This was an interview with Sumathi Athuluri, one of our core members. The article has received quite a bit of attention:
 - ◇ Free Republic
 - ◇ Jewish World Review
 - ◇ Gut Rumbles
 - ◇ Blog on Political Comment

- Fox News/Associated Press interview with several of our members.
- Article in the Sea Coast Online.
- Interview by National Public Radio.
- Interview by WUSA TV 9 in Washington, D.C.
- Article in NewsIndia-Times.
- Article in Baltimore Sun.
- Article in India West.
- Letter to the Editor in the Washington Post.
- Article by Suzanne Gamboa from Associated Press. The article appeared on multiple media sites. Among them are The Dallas Morning News, Star-Telegram, KRISTV.COM, elNuevoHerald.com, and El Mexicano Online.

UniteFamilies.org would like to thank all our members who worked with reporters for these articles. We will continue our outreach efforts and we ask every affected member to contact their local newspapers and radio/TV stations and share their stories. By raising awareness among the public, we can ensure that Congress notices the family separation problem of LPRs and fixes it.

Group Statistics

Below, we compare the current group statistics (as of July 16) with those from the March issue of our Newsletter (March 11).

<i>Item</i>	<i>3/11</i>	<i>7/16</i>
Online petition signatures	1,462	1,794
Paper petition signatures	173	173
Home page visits	9,786	15,234
Discussion group members	673	759
Co-sponsors H.R. 1823	11	13
Co-sponsors S. 1919	None	None
Co-sponsors H.R. 4448	9	9

It is encouraging to see that H.R. 1823 received support from two more Representatives – Rep. Barbara Lee (D-CA-9) and Rep. Dennis J. Kucinich (D-OH-10). Our membership exceeded 750 and the petition gets roughly 100 signatures per month.

The State Department Visa Bulletins for the last three months highlighted a disturbing trend — retrogression of F2A cutoff dates for all countries except Mexico. In the last three months, the cutoff date has retrogressed by two and a half years!

<i>Item</i>	<i>4/06 Cutoff</i>	<i>8/06 Cutoff</i>
Other countries	3/1/02	9/8/99
Mexico	6/15/99	9/8/99

We urge you to sign our online petition to Congress if you have not already done so. Please sign the English or the Spanish petition. English: <http://petitiononline.com/unitefam>; Spanish: <http://petitiononline.com/unirfami>. Our home page is at <http://unitefamilies.org>. If you are not a member of our discussion group, consider joining. The group is at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/unitefamilies> and you can join by filling the form at <http://unitefamilies.org/action/join.html>.

Guest Column: How to Win Friends and Influence the Congress

A step by step guide

By Paul Donnelly
Consultant for *UniteFamilies.org*

Going back to the early 1990s, I have gotten to know many LPRs who are shocked and dismayed by the same immigration mess that motivates *UniteFamilies.org*. So this is to track the path many of you have followed, to become an effective force toward our goal of fixing this cruel foolishness.

First, you get your green card and, as a legal permanent resident of the United States, either you marry or you consider marriage, only to discover that rather than living happily ever after, immigration laws will separate you and your beloved for years on end. This makes you alternately sad or angry, and moves you to *do* something about it.

Second, you begin to talk to friends and colleagues, immigration lawyers, political activists, the press, and perhaps even members of Congress. This is good — but it's where some important subtleties are often missed.

So the third step should be to realize what moves most Americans regarding immigration. Remember, an “immigrant” starts out as a foreigner, someone who literally does not belong here. It isn't (but it's close) unique to America that through *legal* immigration a foreigner can become an American, but the key to using that feeling to our advantage is not to take it for granted. So, don't take it for granted when you are talking to people, especially to the press and politicians. If you want, say it explicitly, rather than assuming they agree: that way, you can find the best way to phrase it. A question can

help: “Isn't the purpose of American immigration to make good Americans out of us? How can we do that, when immigration law drives a wedge between husband and wife?”

Fourth, take the step to recognize that as a legal *permanent* resident, you have made a commitment to the United States, expressed in the law that requires you to spend most of your time in the U.S. until you become a citizen. It helps to remind people of that, with examples like Nick Semenov, who lost his bid for U.S. citizenship because he spent too much time outside the United States with his critically injured wife in a hospital in Kazakhstan.

The fifth step is to recognize the contradiction between your commitment to the United States as an LPR, and your commitment to your spouses in marriage. Many LPRs, I find, have so deeply internalized this that they can't readily express it in persuasive ways, taking it for granted that America simply must allow LPR spouses to come here legally, and even threatening to leave the United States for failing to recognize such an obvious moral imperative. Neither of these approaches work, except for folks who already agree with us, and they're not the ones we're trying to persuade. Again, the question form can help: “I love America, and I love my spouse — how can it help America to separate us?”

So the sixth step is *organization*. Going all the way back to Professionals for Spousal Reunification back in 1994, I have seen at least four organizations like *UniteFamilies.org* formed for the purpose of LPR spouses and kids. Individuals who have joined and contribute *UniteFamilies.org* are doing a powerful thing. We have members in 34 states, and we're growing. Email each other. Build a list. Recruit, ask for names of likely recruits. Be sure we're visible at every opportunity.

But the seventh step aims at being effective, which is the purpose of getting organized in the first place. Since this little essay aims at tracking what individuals go through, step by step, rather than how *UniteFamilies.org* is structured, consider the different paths. Any organization is made up of people who do lots of the work, who are in the core group or the steering committee, who have everybody's name and phone number and email address, and others who simply watch — and a few who mostly criticize, whose contribution is primarily negative. Criticism can be a positive thing — the boy who said the emperor has no clothes was the hero of that story.

So the eighth step, for individuals as well as the organization, is to find a way for everybody to participate that moves the whole organization forward. In politics, this is the 'give every volunteer something to do' imperative. If you are an organizer, *organize*. *UniteFamilies.org* needs to recruit and retain new members, from the hundreds of thousands of LPRs who are separated from their spouses, just like you are. Reach out. Give those who express any interest something to do, materials to read, links to follow from the website. Ask what they think. Get them participating. The best way to make friends is, oddly enough, not to do something for them, but to get them to do something for you, because that is how an interest becomes a commitment. The newsletter is an excellent tool. Come up with more tools. If you just watch, make it an active watching, because we will need your help. Tell people about *UniteFamilies.org*. When you have a criticism, when you disagree about this or that (those of you who urge the V visa option, for example), *say so* — within the organization, on the website, get things stirred up. (One way to do this sort of thing positively is in the form of questions, e.g., "why this, and not that?")

The ninth step is: the trees. Have specific goals and methods for reaching them, the way a tree has roots that all become one trunk, and branches that go out everywhere from that single trunk. We have members in 34 states. That's 68 Senators, and perhaps 200 U.S. representatives. Every single one of them should not only know what *UniteFamilies.org* is, and what it wants, he or she should also know the name of several *UniteFamilies.org* individuals, where they live, and that they have friends and colleagues who sympathize... and vote. Write letters to the editor, call talk radio, show up at town meetings, meet Senators and U.S. Representatives.

Tenth, have message discipline. Part of what I do for an effort like this, in helping you to be effective, is help you craft a message that can be effective.

For *UniteFamilies.org*, the basic message is that the spouses and kids of *legal* immigrants should be legally united with them in the United States. *How* that is done is secondary, the means to the end. Message discipline means, for example, that if a *UniteFamilies.org* member gets a Senator or U.S. Representative in a public forum, the simplest goal is to get them to say "I agree" to that statement. Again, questions can be phrased to be most effective: "Senator, as a supporter of traditional marriage, don't you agree that spouses and kids of *legal* immigrants should be legally united in the U.S.? The minimum wait right now is nearly seven years. How would it be acceptable for you, as a married man, for the law to separate legal immigrants from their spouses and children?"

One of the tricks of the political trade is to get politicians to accept a principle in the form of a practical question. When they say: "that's a caseworker issue" or "talk to my staff," get them to agree to the broadest and blandest

possible commitment: husbands and wives of LPRs ought to be together, of course, and after that it's complicated.

What happens after that can build on the agreement we've reached, to make it a commitment, and then a tactical alliance. Message discipline means *not* negotiating constantly with ourselves, much less with decision-makers, about what we want. Our basic message is what we want. Get 'em to say they want it, too.

Eleventh, that strategic clarity gives us tactical flexibility. When a *UniteFamilies.org* member talks to an LPR who is considering joining, but perhaps says 'I don't believe we can achieve anything,' or 'the only thing that will work is this, and you're aiming at that,' the same key applies: Do they support the basic message that the spouses and kids of *legal* immigrants should be legally united with them in the United States? Then they should join with us. Likewise, in talking to other immigration advocates, who want amnesty, or a guest worker program, or more H-1B visas or "open borders," etc., turn the key on them: they should be with us, also.

Twelfth, and finally: as an individual who is primarily motivated to get your own spouse into the U.S. legally, you're also part of an organization (at least, since step Six) that is aimed at fixing the law so for *all* spouses and kids of LPRs. In the past, groups of individuals like you have come together and failed to fix the law, *and* to sustain the organization, so that as their individual spouses and kids finally got their green cards (or the LPR spouse gave up on their dreams, and left), those individuals left the organization which gradually evaporated. *UniteFamilies.org* is not a selfish organization. It is made up of people who see beyond their own circumstances to a general injustice, which you want to set right. I admire you all for that.

I want to fix this provision in the law, better this year than next year. So do all of you, I think. So let's focus on the short term, on *this* Congress, on *these* steps (the news media, the hearings, the editorial board meeting with the Washington Post on July 11), bearing in mind that the Congress is not often influenced by short-timers. Our opponents were there ten and twenty years ago, they will be there ten or twenty years from now.

Let's work so that *this* will have been fixed, and we can all get on with our lives. These are the 12 steps to do it.

Questions, criticism or comments, contact me.

Paul Donnelly's e-mail address is pauldonnelly@medialever.com

Call to Action

There is not much we can add to Paul's column. He has said it all. Please read it. Read it again and *act*. Only our action can make Congress agree that separating husbands from wives and children is a cruel injustice that must be fixed. Act now to make this country a better place since we chose to live here and to call it home.

Contact your Lawmakers

Call and write to your Senators and Representatives *now*. Make them aware of your separation from the spouse and children. Make them to agree that this separation is cruel and unjust. Ask them to solve it *now*. Bring to their attention the "immediate relatives" language that Sen. Hagel and Sen. Martinez proposed during an early stage of Senate debate. This amendment would exempt LPR spouses and children from numerical limits. This would also free up

more immigrant visas for families of U.S. citizens. Mention the “V-visa” for spouses and children of LPRs as a possible solution.

We repeat again that it is critical for lawmakers to hear from their affected constituents. There is no adverse consequence in contacting a lawmaker. Nothing is going to happen to fix our problem until each one of us participates. Write to your Congressperson and Senators. Write again and request a meeting. Write to your local newspaper, radio and TV stations requesting an article or segment highlighting our problem. Ask your spouse to join our Yahooogroup. Every action by every member counts. Right now there is a real chance to fix the family separation problem of LPRs once and for all!

Donate

Please donate! We are critically short of funds. After our recent calls for donation we were able to raise enough money to sign a contract with Paul Donnelly for May, June and July. We thank everyone who contributed. However, we need more donations in order to have him on board for August and later. You can donate to *UniteFamilies.org* by writing us a check or by PayPal; the instructions are on our website (<http://unitefamilies.org/action/donate.html>).¹

Consider this as an investment—the time and money saved in avoiding frequent travel to be united with your spouse and children will more than compensate the donation.

This newsletter was prepared by Ajit Natarajan and Alex Maslov.

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¹We are *not* a 501(c)(3) registered charity, so donations are *not* tax deductible. All donations and expenses are tabulated in the database section of our Yahoo group (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/unitefamilies>).