

JACOBY SETS UP IMMIGRATIONWORKS USA TO EDUCATE PUBLIC ON BENEFITS OF IMMIGRATION

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McALLEN, May 11 – A former fellow of the Manhattan Institute who has advised the Texas Border Coalition on immigration issues in the past has set up a new national organization to promote comprehensive immigration reform.

Tamar Jacoby says ImmigrationWorks USA has two main goals: to educate the public about the benefits of immigration and build a mainstream grassroots constituency in favor of an overhaul. That constituency will likely be led by business owners who are willing to speak out and demand that it gets done, Jacoby told the *Guardian*.

"I don't think we are going to get comprehensive immigration reform passed until the business community steps up to the plate and makes its voice heard to its members of Congress," Jacoby said.

"It can't just be the lobbyists in Washington. It cannot just be the lobbyists at the state capitols. It has to be ordinary guys willing to write and call their members of Congress. Otherwise, the other side is fielding hundreds of thousands of people and we do not have any soldiers on the field."

Jacoby made her comments after speaking at an immigration summit organized by Texas Employers for Immigration Reform (TEIR) at the McAllen Convention Center on Friday.

Jacoby has been a leading conservative voice in the media and elsewhere in favor of immigration reform for many years. A former writer for *Newsweek* and deputy editor of *The New York Times* op-ed page, she has published a series of essays about the importance of infusing immigrants into the fabric of American life in a book titled 'Reinventing the Melting Pot: The New Immigrants and What It Means To Be American.'

Jacoby first became known to many border elected officials and business leaders when she attended a hearing of the House Subcommittee on International Terrorism and Nonproliferation in Laredo in July 2006. The subcommittee was chaired by Rep. Ed Royce, a Republican from Orange County, California.

Jacoby told the *Guardian* at the time that the hearing was "skewed" because border elected officials were not allowed to testify. She also said that the then Republican-controlled House's border enforcement-only solution was "no solution at all."

The following month, Jacoby spoke to the Texas Border Coalition in Austin and soon afterwards the group set up an immigration committee to fight for comprehensive immigration reform and oppose a border wall.

A border wall had been offered as a quick fix solution to illegal immigration by Republican House members at the Laredo hearing and other similar hearings throughout the summer of 2006. Those hearings paved the way for the Secure Fence Act, which mandated that 700 miles of two-layered reinforced fencing be erected along five areas of the U.S.-Mexican border. It was passed by Congress in late 2006.

In her speech at the TEIR summit, Jacoby pointed out that she was a veteran of the “immigration wars” on Capitol Hill and had “scars all over to prove it.”

Jacoby said the lobbying work has convinced her that many if not a majority of House and Senate members back comprehensive immigration reform.

“They tell me, ‘You don’t need to explain, I get it,’” Jacoby said, of her conversations with members of Congress. “They will say, ‘I have agriculture in my district, or I have construction boom in my district, or hospitality resorts in my districts. I know we need the workers and I know it would be better if they were legal.’”

Unfortunately, Jacoby said, those same members of Congress feel they cannot come out and say publicly what they tell her privately. And they certainly, right now, cannot vote for comprehensive immigration reform. The reason, she said, is that their mail boxes are filled to the brim with letters and e-mails against immigration reform.

Jacoby recalled a conversation she had with a couple of staffers on Capitol Hill. One staffer said the e-mails were running 400 to one in opposition to immigration reform. The other said his colleague was lucky; at least he had one person supporting it.

“We are not on the field,” Jacoby said. “It’s like we are in a battle and they have a massive army and we are not on the field.”

Jacoby confided that she had literally spent a couple of years of her life “angry” at a certain Texas senator for his position on immigration. She said she would not name him because she was in Texas and he had staff in the room.

“He would say, ‘I get it,’ and then would not vote for it (comprehensive immigration reform) in public,” Jacoby said. “Finally, I realized I should not be mad at him because it is our fault. We didn’t change the climate where it is easy for him to take that vote. As long as he is getting hundreds of thousands of e-mails from them and not from us, that’s our fault, not his fault. There’s no point being mad at him. We’ve got to step up to the plate.”

Jacoby pointed out that the “other side” was able to mobilize tens of thousands of opponents of comprehensive immigration reform during last year’s Senate debate of the Secure Borders, Economic Opportunity and Immigration Reform Act of 2007, otherwise known as S. 1348.

The bill, authored by Sens. Ted Kennedy, D-Mass., and John McCain, R-Ariz., would have provided legal status and a path to legal citizenship for the 12 million or so undocumented immigrants living in the United States. It would also have provided more visas for high skilled workers, and sufficient funding to hire 20,000 extra Border Patrol agents and erect 300 miles of vehicle barriers on the southern border. The bill was supported by President Bush.

Though S. 1348 was never voted on, it was defeated through a parliamentary procedure on June 7. A related bill, S. 1639, failed on June 28.

Jacoby described the defeat of the two bills as “really bitter.” She said she was standing next to Department of Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff and Commerce Secretary Carlos Gutierrez as senators walked in for the vote on S. 1639. “It was a horrible, horrible, day,” Jacoby recalled.

After the defeat, Jacoby did a lot of soul searching, trying to analyze what the supporters of comprehensive immigration reform, such as the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, did wrong. She said the answer was not that complicated and that she and others should have figured it out a long time ago. "We don't yet have any ordinary Americans who vote who are willing to raise their hand and say we want this reform," Jacoby concluded.

The defeat of the Senate bills led Jacoby to form ImmigrationWorks USA and to focus on immigration legislation being formulated in dozens of states across the nation.

Such a focus will likely keep her and the group busy. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), at least 1,106 bills related to immigration and immigrants have been considered in 44 states in the first three months of 2008.

While many of the 1,106 bills are anti-immigrant, Jacoby sees the debates in the state legislatures as an opportunity. If opposition to the bills can be forged through a coalition of business interests in each state, a potential national movement could grow for comprehensive immigration reform, Jacoby told the TEIR conference.

"Business people are coming out of the woodwork. They can see this is a train coming right at them. They are coming together in groups like TEIR. They are forming coalitions. They fight some battles at the state level and before long you have an army to take to the federal level," she said.

Predicting "little activity" on the immigration front in the short-to-medium term in Washington, D.C., Jacoby said individual states were now the "frontline" for the reform battle.

Arizona and Oklahoma have led the way in passing legislation that heavily penalizes employers who hire undocumented workers. Jacoby warned that lawmakers in other states were looking at those states and planning "copycat" legislation. She predicted Texas would see its fair share of such bills.

"This is a movie that's coming to a movie theatre near you," Jacoby said. "But you can make a difference if you get involved and you help TEIR fight it. You do need to get involved. Don't think someone else will take care of it."

Jacoby said business leaders in other states were also learning from Arizona and Oklahoma and forming coalitions to protect their interests.

She cited Virginia, where 100 anti-immigrant bills were filed and businesses from all sectors formed a coalition to demand a seat at the table when the legislation was crafted.

As a result of the Virginia business community getting active, Jacoby said, a compromise was passed that allows the state to only go after the "real bad guys." She defined those as businesses that deliberately pay a \$1 an hour, deliberately hire workers, and deliberately exploit them.

"They negotiated a compromise that business could live with," Jacoby said, of legislative events in Virginia.

And in Arizona, Jacoby told the *Guardian* after her speech, there was now a movement to get a state guest worker program going because the business community realized anti-immigrant legislation was leading to an exodus of workers.

"One of the things I'm behind is Arizona's effort to get a temporary worker program. Congress will never allow them to have a temporary worker program but it tells you how bad things are," Jacoby said. "Maybe Arizona passes a guest worker program, and then Virginia and Colorado. It's a way of saying to Congress, hey, we need those workers."

Jacoby concluded her TEIR speech by calling on the 30 or so business leaders in the audience to get involved in the immigration debate. She told them they were on the frontline of the battle and they needed to write and call their members of Congress.

"If you get involved you can make a difference," Jacoby said. "Reach out to your friends. You need to bring in your peers, employees, and suppliers. We need to create that army to push back at the state level and then pushback at the federal level, or we are not going to get the outcomes we need."