

Speaker takes a bipartisan approach to immigration



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Jennifer Bell

The Honorable Gordon Quan, an immigration lawyer and former politician, spoke to the Cypress-Tomball Democrats group at their March 16 meeting about immigration.

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By Jennifer Bell | 0 comments

Last year, when the Development, Relief, and Education of Alien Minors (DREAM) Act was blocked by the U.S. Senate, it seemed the immigration debate had come to a halt. As concerns about the national budget deficit have grown, immigration issues have been put on the backburner in favor of economic legislation this year.

But the debate hasn't ended--State Rep. Debbie Riddle-R, of Harris County District 150, which covers parts of the Tomball, Klein, and Spring areas, has introduced several bills dealing with undocumented immigrants, including one that would make hiring an illegal immigrant a state felony.

While some Republican leaders view "immigration reform" as stricter punishment for those immigrants in the country illegally, many Democratic politicians still support legislation like the DREAM Act that would encourage pathways to legal citizenship.

At the Cypress-Tomball Democrats' March 16 meeting, the Honorable Gordon Quan, former Houston City Council member and Harris County Judge candidate, spoke to the group to encourage both parties to see the positives in creating a better immigration system.

In his presentation, entitled, "Why Everyone Should Embrace Immigration, including Republicans", Quan reflected on his experience as an immigration lawyer, as well as a politician. There are many pressing issues that immigration is affecting, Quan said, and both parties would do well to address them.

"One of the biggest things Republicans promise is 'no new taxes' or that they won't raise taxes," said Quan. "With a \$27 billion shortfall, how do we get money without raising taxes? We have grown because of immigration, and we get more in taxes as a result."

Quan said he recognized the argument that illegal immigrants do not pay taxes, and his counterpoint was that, perhaps indirectly, illegal immigrants do pay taxes.

"They drive on roads, pay rent, buy gas," said Quan. "Directly or indirectly, these are taxes that they pay."

In addition to the tax issue, Quan said that jobs are another main concern in the immigration debate.

While Quan acknowledged the argument that illegal immigrants are draining the job market for legal U.S. citizens, he said the types of jobs illegal immigrants do cannot compare to what legal citizens can choose to do.

"Does anybody want their children to work in construction or domestic service?" said Quan. "I don't believe so."

Quan also said that, while some immigrants do not work in low-skilled jobs, they contribute to creative entrepreneurship that benefits the state and country. Former Texas gubernatorial candidate Farouk Shami, Quan said, is one example.

"He came here as an international student...his family wanted him to be a doctor," said Quan. "Well, he wanted to be a hairdresser, and he used his knowledge of chemistry and biology to create hair products like the CHI technology. He now employs 2500 people in this area in his business."

In Quan's vision of immigration reform, he said that he actually looked to a Texas Republican for inspiration, as he believed George W. Bush had sound ideas on immigration policies.

"He had a plan where people earned the right to stay here, were on a probationary period to show that they are paying taxes, not getting in trouble with law, and learning English," said Quan. "He also looked into a guest-worker

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Gordon Quan was the first Asian-American elected to an At-Large City Council position and Mayor Pro-Tem for the City of Houston in 1999. Born in China, Quan moved to Houston at the age of three. He earned his BA in History and Government at the University of Texas, his Master's Degree in Education from the University of Houston, and a law degree at South Texas College of Law.

Quan's practice has focused on immigration law. He has been selected for inclusion in Texas Super Lawyers, Best Lawyers in America and Who's Who in American Law. His firm, FosterQuan, LLP, is one of the largest immigration law firms in the world. The firm has offices in Houston, San Antonio, Austin, Rio Grande Valley, Mexico City, and Washington, D.C.

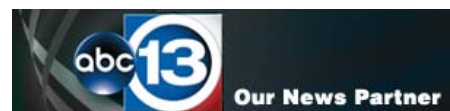
Quan is a founding member of the Asian American Bar Association in Houston and the Asian American Coalition in Houston.

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program, which the United Nations has said is key to global development."

Overall, Quan said he believes that immigration is not going to stop being an issue for either party, and Republicans must eventually accept immigration reform in order to move forward.

"By their policies, they are alienating our Hispanic community, our fastest growing community," said Quan. "Immigration reform is not just a Democratic idea--it's an idea for self-preservation."

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