

**WISCONSIN INSTITUTE**  
FOR PUBLIC POLICY AND SERVICE



***The New Challenges of American Immigration: What Should We Do?***

**A report on the series of National Issues Forums held in Marathon County, Wisconsin  
January – March, 2008**

**Forums hosted and report issued by the  
Wisconsin Institute for Public Policy and Service**

**In partnership with  
Marathon County Public Library  
Wisconsin Humanities Council  
University of Wisconsin-Marathon County**

**And the  
Kettering Foundation**

**April 19, 2009**

**(Full Report)**

## OVERVIEW OF THE FORUMS PROJECT

### Background of the Project

As is the case across much of America, especially in this election year, the issue of immigration is a concern in our community. A closer look at the situation in Marathon County offers a unique insight into this issue as, during the past three decades, from 1976 to 2004 (on the heels of the closure of the last Thai refugee camp at Wat Tham Krabok), the county was a flourishing model of successful resettlement of approximately 5,000 Hmong and Laotian immigrants that found their way to the United States in the aftermath of the Vietnam War. (The other areas of major Hmong immigration during these years were California, Minnesota, and New York.) This massive influx of Southeast Asian immigrants presented an array of challenges for the central Wisconsin area and changed the face of our community in, as most might now arguably agree, a very positive way. Now, the Marathon County area, with ample job opportunities in the dairy industry, field work and light manufacturing, holds an ever-increasing appeal for a new wave of immigration: agricultural workers from Mexico and South America.

With these issues in mind, the Wisconsin Institute for Public Policy and Service (WIPPS), located on the campus of UW-Marathon County, in collaboration with the Marathon County Public Library (MCPL), the Kettering Foundation, and the Wisconsin Humanities Council, sponsored **The New Challenges of American Immigration: What Should We Do?**, a series of town hall meetings, open to all community members and structured as National Issues Forums that employed the Kettering Model of Deliberative Democracy. These public dialogues were held in the nine MCPL locations of Edgar, Athens, Marathon, Spencer, Stratford, Hatley, Mosinee, Rothschild and Wausau, from January – March, 2008. In addition, a student forum was held on the University of Wisconsin – Marathon County campus (UWMC). Moderators for the events, Eric Giordano, WIPPS Director and Assistant Professor of Political Science at UWMC, and Jim Veninga, WIPPS Advisory Board member and Associate Professor of Religious Studies at UWMC, were trained in facilitation through the Kettering program. Note-takers for the events included: Jean Greenwood, WIPPS Program Associate, Ross Ingram, WIPPS intern, and Deborah Warren, WIPPS volunteer. This summary report of the forums is issued, and will be disseminated, for the use of our partners and various Marathon County agencies.

The intent of the forums was to address some of the basic tensions underlying the debate over current and future U.S. immigration policy, such as: Do the costs of our immigration policy outweigh the benefits? Is change necessary? If so, how will we arrive at a manageable strategy for change? What are the major tensions and stumbling blocks to creating a workable national policy? What does the current status of U.S. immigration policy mean for Wisconsin? What changes are in the best interests of Wisconsin and in particular central Wisconsin?

Americans have championed the United States as a nation of immigrants, a place of refuge for those persecuted and a land of opportunity for those seeking new beginnings. Yet current immigration policy--and the enforcement of that policy--is widely debated, and is fast becoming a central issue in this year's presidential contest.

At this moment, thousands of people who live south of the U.S. border are contemplating illegal entry into the United States. Many will successfully make the journey, as have hundreds of thousands before them. In the U.S., work is plentiful and immigrants (documented and undocumented) are successfully finding means for improving their lives. Service and agricultural

sectors of the economy have welcomed the addition of inexpensive labor, even if national laws have not.

While most Americans believe that, historically, immigration has strengthened the United States, many now wonder whether current immigration laws and unchecked illegal immigration is creating a substantial drain on American resources. States and even local laws are emerging to try and address what is normally a federal responsibility.

Among the goals of the Marathon County forums was to open a dialogue built on public deliberation grounded in “issue framing,” a schematic that encourages consideration and discussion. National Issues Forum “framing” documents were used to identify different, often competing, ways of dealing with an issue or problem. It is the firm conviction of the NIF process that “when citizens talk through their differences, when they consider actions and consequences, when they acknowledge the trade-offs they’re willing to accept in order to address a problem” they not only create meaningful dialogue and “see themselves in the choices or approaches they are asked to consider,” but also “crystallize the ideas that really matter to them” and, in the process, “come to understand what matters most to people with whom they disagree” (*Framing Issues for Public Deliberation – A Curriculum Guide for Workshops*). Although the NIF format does not require an action outcome, the forums do “improve the chances of people acting in concert or in a complimentary way.” But the real purpose of this kind of public deliberation is to go beyond partisan rhetoric and help people generate a core set of principles that motivate both them and those they disagree with. If, in the process, some action steps or possible solutions to the challenges emerge, that is an added value for the outcome. But what ultimately results from dialogues conducted through this process is a deeper level of citizenship for all parties involved. If people know their voices will be heard and their perspectives will be valued, they will be more likely to take ownership of problems and talk about what they can do, not what others should do.

### **Structure of the Forums**

The NIF model approach to public dialogue posits that how an issue is framed determines how it is discussed. For this series of forums centered on immigration reform, three “approaches” were considered. They were:

**Approach One** – There are too many immigrants: their numbers should be limited, or America risks losing its identity. Newcomers that cluster in immigrant communities fail to assimilate and don’t learn English. The current immigration process also allows for the potential threat of admitting terrorists into the U.S.

**Approach Two** – We are a nation of immigrants. Our strength and our heritage were built on immigration. The humanitarian response must be to allow refugees to immigrate. We must help newcomers to thrive and become Americans.

**Approach Three** – America must put economics first. We must limit the number of immigrants because they are a drain on our economy, keeping wages down, taking jobs, and costing taxpayers more in terms of support and services.

At each of the Marathon County forums, after a brief introductory video, moderators guided discussion on the three approaches, note-takers recorded feedback for each approach, and

underlying core principles were also recorded on a separate flipchart. At the conclusion of each 90 minute session, moderators summed up the session by reiterating participants' thoughts and contributions.

## **Methodology**

The National Issues Forum, a “non partisan, nationwide network of organizations and individuals who sponsor public forums and training institutions for public deliberation,” constructed a model for encouraging and conducting public dialogues across America. The model involves these steps:

1. Lay out ground rules for discussion.
2. Introduce issues.
3. Draw participants into discussion by keeping a healthy atmosphere for discussion (i.e., ask participants questions).
4. Encourage participants to consider alternatives carefully.
5. Lead the final segment of a discussion, to “reflect” upon the experience.

The following are the possible impacts of National Issues Forums on participants, according to Melville, Willingham & Dedrick, 2005 (qtd. in Gastil and Levine):

1. Participation in NIF forums heightens interest in specific issues and in public affairs and leads to higher levels of public engagement
2. Participation in NIF forums broadens the outlook of participants.
3. As a result of participating in forums, individuals come to experience themselves in different ways, and they learn new ways of taking part in groups.
4. Participation in NIF forums enhances people's sense of themselves as political actors who can make a difference in their communities.
5. People construe their self-interest more broadly as a result of taking part in deliberative conversations.
6. Deliberation helps people move beyond superficial preferences to considered public judgment.

## **Additional Information/Details of the Events**

This series of forums was advertised in the local media (The Wausau Daily Herald, and public service spots on local radio, TV, and Wisconsin Public Radio), through the county library branch outlets, on the University of Wisconsin – Marathon County campus via posters and electronic monitors, and through direct mail announcements to local agencies and community leaders. All forums were free and open to the public. Attendance for all 10 events was 128 (total). It should be noted that the Hatley forum was cancelled, due to lack of attendance. The age range of attendees was 17 – early 70's. All attendees were white, except for one Hispanic at the

community forums; at the student forum held at UWMC, 8 of the attendees were Hmong. Refreshments were offered at the end of each event, and most participants stayed to talk. A reporter from the Wausau Daily Herald attended most of the events, and press coverage, often on an event-by-event basis, was thorough and extensive. The WDH also posted commentary, both from its reporter and community members, on its blog throughout the two months of the discussions.

## **Background on Immigration**

*Historical Framing of the Issue and Rationalization for the Issues Under Consideration*  
(a brief background paper prepared by Professor Jim Veninga)

### **Immigration and Nationality Act Amendments of 1965**

- These amendments reflected the values that Americans have placed on our immigrant past. America was conceived as a refuge for people fleeing persecution and economic deprivation and a place to provide new opportunities and new beginnings. This led to a conviction that America's dynamism comes from its diversity and from immigrants.
- The Act ended national quotas.
- The Act introduced for the first time the principle of family-sponsored immigration (or employer/resettlement organization).
- Proponents of these Amendments believed that they would not increase immigration nor significantly change the ethnic makeup of the country. Now it appears that immigration has increased and that it has changed the makeup of the country. For example, today, in Worthington, MN—a town of 10,000—the school's ESL program is teaching students who collectively speak more than 50 different languages.
- Yet for many communities, immigrants are very much welcomed, and actively recruited by factories, farmers and others.
- There are currently about 1,200,000 new immigrants arriving every year. Of this number, 300,000 are here "illegally"—entering without proper papers or overstaying a temporary visa.
- Today, about 10 percent of the population—close to 30 million—consists of immigrants.
- Economic impact: Over the past decade, new immigrants have accounted for more than half the growth in our nation's labor force. But there is controversy here: Some see these immigrants as an essential part of our economy. Others see them as a drain on the economy, and as individuals who take jobs away from those already here.

### **Recent Changes in Immigration Policy**

- After September 11, 2001 homeland security legislation divided the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) into two separate bureaus, one for controlling borders and another for welcoming and processing new citizens. The INS is today known as the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services.
- One issue that has emerged: Is the new law's emphasis on border enforcement tainting all people who come to this country as suspected terrorists, with the result that civil rights for immigrants—workers, students, and family members alike—may be eroding? Are we sacrificing some core American values in the process of protecting our borders? Or, is this the price we must pay to be "secure"?

### **The Need for Public Discussion**

Immigration poses new challenges. Here are some key questions:

- How many immigrants should we admit? And in what categories?
- What are the political and social impacts of immigration?
- What is the extent and true cost of **illegal** immigration?
- Do immigrants help America compete in a global economy?
- Does America continue to be strengthened by the arrival of new immigrants—as in the past—or has something changed? Do the benefits outweigh the costs?

### **Should We Change Our Law Again?**

- We must remember: Concerns about immigration are not new. Ben Franklin worried about having too many Germans. In the late 1800s, Congress passed the first immigration exclusion laws (forbidding entrance to prostitutes and convicts, and later to Japanese, Chinese, and other Asian immigrants). Yet immigration continued to grow, reaching a high of 1.3 million immigrants in 1907.
- Whether driven by the *pull* of freedom, jobs, and opportunity, or by the *push* of poverty, persecution, or the threat of war, immigrants became a powerful economic force - laying railroad track, mining ore and coal, harvesting crops, and helping operate America's farms, factories and mills.
- Nearly one-half of immigrants to the U.S. today are Asian or Latino—creating a fear among some that is similar to the fear that large numbers of Germans, Irish, and Italians immigrants brought earlier.
- Yet the number of **legal** immigrants is carefully controlled. Current laws award immigrant visas for one of three reasons:
  - (A) **Family-sponsored immigration** (about 75%). Laws require family sponsors to earn at least 125 percent of the federal poverty level—but sometimes this is simply not enough to provide support. Hence, there is a perceived (and actual) burden to taxpayers (immigrants can't receive federal benefits for 10 years but can receive state and local benefits—education, medical and social services). Note: there are institutional sponsors as well as family sponsors.
  - (B) **Political refugees**. The number of refugees worldwide continues to increase (from 3 million annually in 1976 to 12 million today). After September 11, the number America receives has *decreased*, down from 120,000 in 1992 to 35,000 in 2002. Thus refugees account for only about one-half of a percent of the total legal immigrant population.
  - (C) **To help meet the needs of the labor force**. Skill-based visas have doubled since 1990: there are 140,000 given annually—about 15% of legal immigrants.
- Increased attention is given to illegal immigrants—“find and deport” seems to be the policy. But enforcing the law has become complex and often troubling. The human cost appears high, as there is hardship from arrangements with smugglers, and a significant threat of death while crossing the border, etc. Human rights issues also emerge. Do we need tougher immigration policies to control illegal immigrants? Is fence-building a solution? What about the proposal for temporary worker programs? What about granting amnesty, like Reagan did in 1986? And does illegal immigration depress the wages of American workers, or is this an economic benefit, boosting our economy as these individuals take jobs that Americans don't want? According to some recent polls, 77 percent of Americans felt the government was not doing enough “to control the border and screen people.”

### **Marathon County Demographics**

Marathon is the largest of Wisconsin's 72 counties (population 126,031 in the 2000 census), and was established in 1850, with the county seat as the city of Wausau (population 38,426 in 2000).

Southeast Asians represented 2.2% of the county population in 1990 and 4.5% in 2000; this reflects, predominantly, successive and ongoing waves of immigration by the Hmong from Laos and Thailand throughout the decade. The LIFE Report of Marathon County, 6<sup>th</sup> ed., survey indicates that in 2006, 4.6% of the county population was Southeast Asian and 1.1% was Latino. In the city of Wausau, the 2000 census reported that 11% of city residents were Southeast Asian. The LIFE Report 2006 indicates that in Marathon County, 7% of residents spoke a language other than English at home, and 38% of those who spoke a language other than English were aged 5-17. The LIFE Report also indicates that of those surveyed (95.4% of whom were white), 21% disagreed or strongly disagreed that there was a benefit to having different races in our community, and 48.6% disagreed or strongly disagreed that race relations were good in our community. These findings from the report about race serve as background and are germane to the NIF dialogues on immigration, in that Wausau, and Marathon County, in recent decades, has found itself engaged in the process of rather rapid assimilation of an immigrant population, which may, to some extent, inform the public's thinking about immigration in general in their geographic area and in the United States as a whole.

## **REPORTING ON THE FORUMS**

### **What We Hope to Report Out**

1. Do the citizens who participated in these town hall meetings see the issue in any way different from how it is being discussed in the media and in legislative bodies? How do they see the issue?
2. How did participants understand the conflicts, the contradictions, and trade-offs of the options discussed?
3. What are the major values that underlie the positions taken?
4. Did any sense of policy direction emerge in each of the discussions? And through all nine town hall meetings?
5. What unique information came out of the forums that we can share with NIF, Kettering Foundation, and office holders (local, state, national)?

### **Some Notes on the Reporting of the Forum Dialogues**

Because each of the three approaches delineated in the NIF Issues Book asked participants to not only respond to the point of view that was presented in the approach, but also consider drawbacks to the point of view, therefore the dialogue, as recorded on the flip chart by the note-taker, began to consolidate into a dialectic about the benefits of immigration and the drawbacks of immigration; more simply put, the recorded comments began to group themselves into the pros and cons of immigration. Granted, to have narrowed the discussion from the beginning to

such a dialectic would have been limiting, at best, and polarizing, at worst; the Kettering model aims to expand dialogue and find common ground. But it was interesting to note that the compiled comments from the flipcharts lent themselves to being categorized in just this fashion. This dialectic was useful, however, for the purposes of the final task: asking participants to reflect on common ground, shared values, and core principles that underlie the debate. Therefore, what follows below is a narrative that reflects the major themes and concerns that arose consistently in each of the nine events. This narrative is subdivided into commentary on the shared principles (areas of agreement) and then the drawbacks for these shared areas of agreement. For a comprehensive breakdown of the “Benefits,” “Drawbacks,” “Core Values” and “Possible Solutions,” please see the bulleted lists of comments found in the appendices of this report.

## **RESPONSES TO THE ISSUES**

(also please see appendices at the end of this report for non-collated responses)

### **Shared Values/ Areas of Agreement**

“The system (for dealing with immigration) is broken,” said an overwhelming number of participants at this series of forums. There were no disputes of this assessment: not one attendee felt the current situation was acceptable, let alone optimal. Most respondents felt that the current policies are unfair to everyone, immigrants and citizens alike. The consensus at the forums was that corrupt employers who seek to profit from the hiring of illegals should face repercussions, but there was some sense of the unfairness of the system towards employers, as participants also noted that many employers, especially small business owners who don’t have the time or resources to do background checks, perhaps don’t realize they are hiring undocumented workers, and these employers should not be prosecuted. Most participants were concerned about the working (and living) conditions of illegal immigrants, and most felt compassion for immigrants who are persecuted refugees, but a number of respondents tempered their empathy by suggesting that illegal immigrants really had no right to complain about “unfair policies” because they were not citizens and came here of their own volition.

Yet with that being said, the majority of respondents felt that, overall, current policies do not reflect core American values, specifically the right to pursue the American dream, as generations of immigrants to this nation have always done, and the right to work hard, contribute, and participate in democracy. Actually, some participants reflected that, not unlike earlier waves of immigrants to this country before them, currently, many hard-working arrivals actually set a *better* model of the American work ethic than do some Americans who, these participants felt, are spoiled and unmotivated. These kinds of Americans don’t want the low-paying jobs that immigrants are willing to take, respondents noted, yet are quick to express concerns about limited resources and social services being overused by immigrants. Many respondents felt that immigration policies were especially under scrutiny now not just because it is an election year, but because of tightened and strained economic times. Some participants expressed greater anger at national policy, the economy, and more “global” issues, such as outsourcing and the loss of American jobs overseas, than at illegal immigrant labor. Although most discussants were aware (somewhat) of America’s green card policies and the legal admittance of highly skilled immigrants (most felt that more green cards should be issued), it was interesting to note that many attendees did not seem to realize that most immigrant workers pay taxes and do contribute to the overall health of the American economy.

“But the law is the law,” a large number of participants insisted, and illegal immigrants are breaking the law. Oftentimes, early in the process in our dialogues, this position, which closely models Lawrence Kohlberg’s Stage Four of moral development, the “Law and Order” stage, dominated, but was slowly modified throughout the ninety minutes of discussion to become a more softened position of allowing that unjust or unenforceable laws do need revisiting, and might need to change. Many participants said, at this point, that whatever ultimate decisions are made about new laws for immigration, the decisions should be based on sound information and good public policy, not uniformed assumptions or judgments or fear.

Some voices implicated the post-9/11 fear of terrorism in some of the “knee-jerk” reactions about admitting immigrants, and spoke to the concern about “overly porous borders”; some respondents indicated genuine anger at Mexico for not “doing its part.” One man speculated that if all the motivated people immigrated north to seek better lives for themselves, “Mexico would lack that many less social activists to change the situation south of the border.” One participant suggested that we help Mexico keep those citizens by assisting in stimulating its economy, while fixing our own policies and, especially, increasing aid to our border states to enforce better policies. The consensus at all the forums was that it was unrealistic to send 12 million or more immigrants back to their points of origin, and even if that “solution” was possible, the economic cost to our nation would be disastrous.

Participants acknowledged that plentiful goods and services provided by cheap immigrant labor enable America’s high standard of living. But a number of discussants linked the “cheap labor issue” to the arrival of subsequent social problems, such as drugs, gangs, and violence. Although fears did come up in the debate, and anger, too, it was heartening to note that many participants expressed that by adding their voices to the debate, and more importantly, by taking the initiative to come out to listen to their neighbors’ voices, they were becoming more informed and better able to make sound, objective decisions about the issue. And they agreed that since basic human rights were at issue, the debate was not only, nor even primarily, about economic policy. It was about heritage and core American values.

Especially in Marathon County, which was not settled until the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and did not really flourish until receiving the influx of German and Polish immigration at the turn of that century, historical roots were pretty close to the surface for most of the attendees at these forums. When given a chance to reflect more deeply on their own immigrant history, attendees recognized, and respected, that America was built on many waves of immigration, and they acknowledged that this fact was a key contributor to the nation’s strength. “America is a tossed salad,” said one woman, “and we do value individuality, but first and foremost we are all Americans.” Many people affirmed that the Constitution and our democracy all must be upheld, as they are what provide Americans with cultural unity. With that principle in mind, respondents stressed that all immigrants should be open to assimilation, and should not retreat to ethnic/national enclaves nor “take the money and run back to their homeland in Mexico.” Nor, said the majority, should they circumvent learning English. Some participants saw the immigration debate in the largest terms, and said it is an invaluable dialogue to be having, as it requires Americans to reexamine what it means to be American and define this more clearly. More practically, a number of speakers insisted that all Americans must contribute and “pull their own weight, not expecting a “free ride”; this, one woman added, “is how you get respect in America, because America respects hard workers.”

## **Drawbacks**

Many drawbacks, or “trade-offs,” arose in the discussion about immigration and immigration policy. A fairly consistent theme of earlier waves of immigration being somehow more legitimate or justifiable emerged. “With our forefathers,” one participant said, “it was about freedom, and the intent to build a nation. Now, it’s about self-interest and dollars, which are taken out of our economy.” Another woman added “times have changed since then. The numbers now overwhelm any previous eras, and we just can’t absorb this many (immigrants).” One man pointed out that immigration erodes America’s labor union system, and another said that illegal immigration is unfair to those who play by the rules and wait to become citizens. Other specific concerns that emerged were: the spread of foreign diseases, the cost to America’s already challenged school systems, and the need for more ESL programs and social services tailored to the immigrant population. Yet these relatively specifically targeted drawbacks were minor in number, compared to the overarching concern that the laws of the nation must be respected and, with current policy, this is not happening. Most participants’ responses seemed to indicate that the work would be to change the laws, but some felt that still, the costs of immigration did outweigh the benefits.

## **Core Principles**

One of the aims of the deliberative democracy model is to arrive at, as much as possible, “core principles,” e.g., those statements or values on which all participants can agree. These are often, by necessity, rather broadly stated, for as soon as specifics are detailed, agreement can become problematic. But the notetaker at each forum kept a “running list” of broad values that emerged as specific issues were discussed (see appendices for bulleted list). For purposes of this document, a summary statement of core values that emerged would best be expressed thusly:

*Americans value fairness, and the current policies about immigration are unfair to all. Although Americans value individuality and individual identity, they also value cultural unity, and therefore all Americans should embrace the American Way (defined, in part, as recognition of America as an immigrant nation that values self-reliance and hard work) and embrace democracy, our Constitution, and our language. We should use a humanitarian, as well as an economic impulse, to change current policies and not be driven by unexamined fears, but then we must enforce the policies that we formulate, out of respect for the law and in fairness to all citizens.*

## **POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION**

Although it is not incumbent on participants in NIF dialogues to evolve action plans, nor are the attendees charged with coming up with solutions to the issue under discussion, many participant comments do move towards this step. The consensus about one putative “solution” was clear (we heard it echoed at almost every forum), and that was: a wall won’t work! Proposals for more credible “solutions” that were shared in this series of forums included the formulation of amnesty, guest worker, and employer mentorship programs. All participants agreed that education and dialogue on the issue would always be part of any solution.

## **REFLECTIONS FROM MODERATORS, NOTETAKERS, OBSERVERS**

At most of the forums, the moderators, note-takers, and observers later wrote reflection pieces that commented on two major areas: the content of the dialogue, and the process of the dialogue. What follows is a comprehensive consolidation (observations on all 8 community dialogues) of these two main “threads”; no reflection piece was submitted for the forum in Hatley that was cancelled due to lack of attendance .

### **Moderator/ Note-taker/ Observer Reflections on the Process**

The level of participation varied rather widely from community to community. “Sister” communities with ostensibly similar profiles, located just down a county road from each other, were often characterized by a remarkably different group process. For example, Edgar and Athens are two towns situated less than ten miles apart, with similar populations and economic bases, but the forum in Athens was marked by enthusiastic and vocal participation (so much so that the moderator had to ensure that certain voices did not dominate), whereas the dialogue in Edgar was hesitant, perhaps even wary and self-protective. Most of the participants in the Athens dialogue seemed to be active community leaders or otherwise engaged citizens who knew each other. This did not seem to be the case in Edgar. The sole Hispanic participant was part of the Athens forum; he was a world traveler and added a valuable dimension to the discussion, reporting on a more global scale, from his own personal observations about the issue. Two of the participants in the Edgar forum later self-disclosed to the moderator (after the discussion had concluded) that they were a brother/sister farm owner pair who did hire illegal immigrants. They noted that they were uncomfortable with the presence of the Wausau Daily Herald reporter at the event. At the Edgar forum, as well as at others where the group members did not seem to know each other, it was observed that many of the participants at first were tempted to look to the moderator to help them formulate their thinking and/or possibly suggest responses. Forums that were held in the larger metropolitan areas, i.e., the cities of Marathon County (the Wausau, Mosinee, and Rothschild MCPL branch outlets) as opposed to the rural village and township areas (Spencer, Stratford, Edgar, Athens and Marathon), attracted participants who had either traveled more widely (again, the evidence was anecdotal, by self-disclosure) or who had read/studied/researched the immigration prior to the dialogue. Participants at all the forums seemed very comfortable with the NIF model, once they were exposed to it. All the dialogues were civil and constructive, even deferential, regarding the array of opinions. (See more commentary on the “Additional Comments: Evaluation Sheets”).

## **EVALUATION OF THE FORUMS**

Two evaluation forms were distributed at each forum: the NIF “The New Challenges of American Immigration Post- Forum Questionnaire” and our own, self-generated “Immigration Town Meeting Survey.” Survey questions for both, plus numeric responses, graphs, and narrative responses are below.

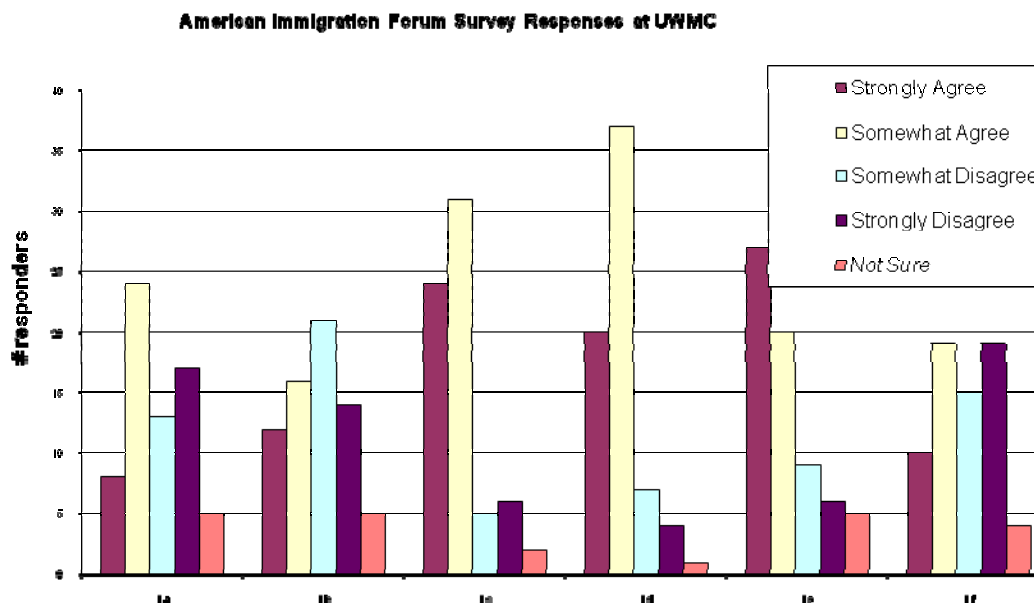
### **The New Challenges of American Immigration Post- Forum Questionnaire**

The National Issues Forum generated a post-forum questionnaire for participants that stated: *Now that you've had a chance to participate in a forum on this issue, we'd like to know what you are thinking. Your opinions, along with those of thousands of others who participated in these forums, will be reflected in a summary report that will be available to all citizens, including those who took part in the forums, as well as officeholders, members of the news media, and others in your community.*

The questions posed by the NIF are as follows (below) and the graphs that follow each question represent the responses.

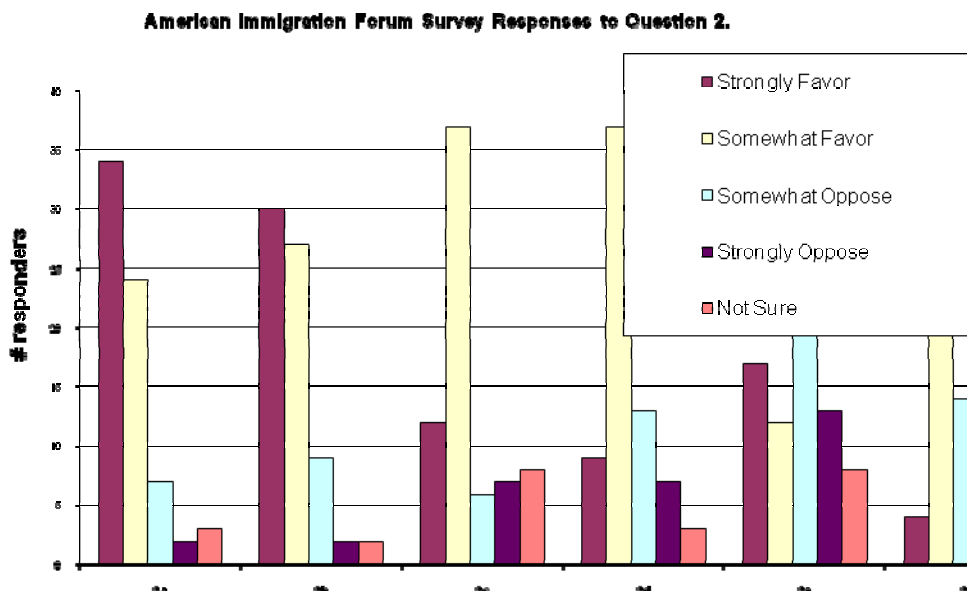
Question 1. Do you agree or disagree with the statements below?

- a. Emphasizing cultural differences is more likely to drive Americans apart than to bring them together.
- b. The main terrorist threat to the U.S. comes from persons who arrive here from abroad.
- c. The country's racial and ethnic diversity is a main source of its strength.
- d. Immigrants have a positive economic impact on this country.
- e. Current levels of immigration strain already overburden social services such as education and health care.
- f. By working for lower pay, low-skilled immigrants displace U.S. workers.



Question 2. Do you favor or oppose each of these actions.

- a. The government should maintain a computerized system to carefully track all foreign students and workers.
- b. All immigrants should be required to learn English so they will be more quickly assimilated.
- c. We should admit more refugees fleeing from religious and political persecution.
- d. We should admit more skilled workers to fill critical occupational shortages in fields like nursing.
- e. The U.S. should drastically reduce the number of immigrants it admits now.
- f. We should provide financial relief to states like California and Texas that have especially large numbers of immigrants.

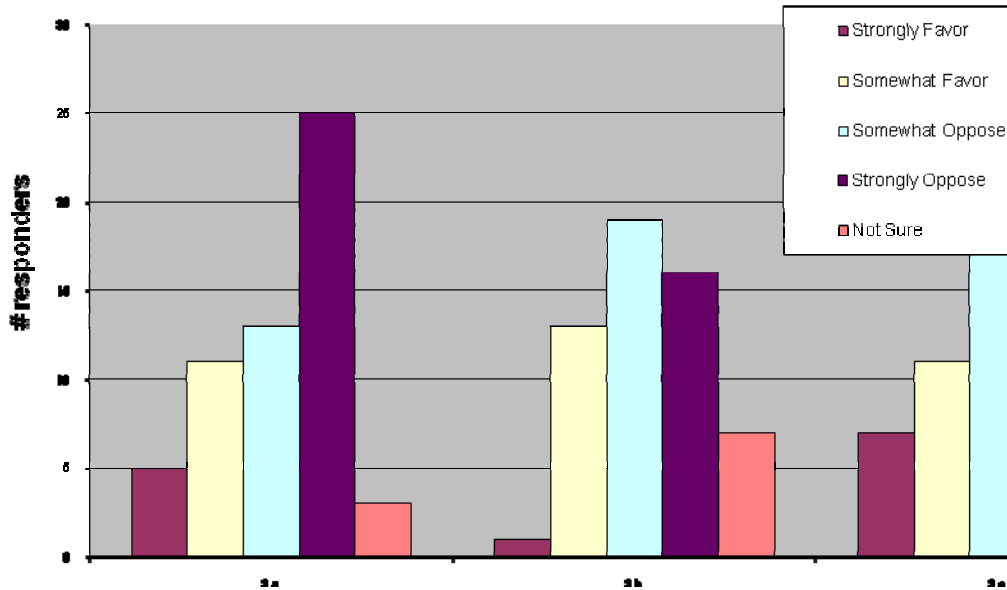


Question 3. Do you favor or oppose each of these actions.

- a. We should discontinue bilingual language programs in schools, EVEN IF this makes it harder for immigrant children to do well in school at first.

- b. We should keep immigration at present levels, EVEN IF this means accepting more unskilled workers who will need social services.
- c. We should reduce the numbers of immigrants allowed into this country, EVEN IF this means keeping families apart and turning away refugees from persecution.

**American Immigration Forum Survey Responses to Question 3.**



Racial breakdown of the responders was:

- 0 African American
- 2 Asian American
- 0 Hispanic
- 1 Native American
- 51 White/Caucasian

The age-category breakdown of the responders was:

- 1 17 years or younger
- 4 18-30 years
- 4 31-45 years
- 27 46-64 years
- 20 65 years or older

The Zip Code areas of respondents are as follows:

- 9 Wausau 54403
- 5 Wausau 54401
- 8 Mosinee 54455

9 Edgar 54426  
4 Marathon 54448  
4 Athens 54411  
4 Schofield 54476  
4 Stratford 54484  
3 Merrill 54452  
1 Rothschild 54474  
2 Marshfield 54449  
1 54479

*(Please note: not all participants responded to the surveys)*

### NIF Post Forum Questionnaire – additional written responses

The NIF-provided questionnaire allowed for participants to share written comments, as well. What follows is a compilation of written responses to each of the questions asked, gathered from all the questionnaires returned.

*1) What, if anything, might citizens in your community do differently as a result of this forum?*

- Further discuss and study the issue
- Hold more forums
- Speak up more
- Get involved in government. It is too partisan.
- Share views with lawmakers
- Deliberate more
- Insist on civil dialogue between parties
- Get immigrants straightened out with their status so they can hold their heads high, being American citizens; otherwise, they should be arrested for breaking the law
- Lean on our government to hold the Mexican government more responsible for the problem
- Help others to be more accepting of other races
- Find a way to get our country to issue official IDs and drivers' licenses for all immigrants in Marathon County after they show they can drive and understand the rules of the road
- I would hope they would come together and come up with a positive solution to immigration
- Talk more
- Get more informed
- Understand that we all have a right to be concerned and a right to talk about our concerns even though we may have different solutions
- See other points of view even if actions don't change
- Accept a family or person from another country into their family and/or community

*2) Are you thinking differently about this issue now that you have participated in the forum?*

- I liked how there were 3 options, not just 2 outlined, which can lead to “good vs. bad” sort of thoughts. We need to take action from the direction of this group and other groups so we can include our newcomers. It is hard for minorities to find their voice in a forum that is dominated by a white majority.
- The issues were clarified more for me. I got to thinking about collaboration among nations and the need for more precise policies.
- I learned that others may share my views and there was more similarity in the views expressed than I might have imagined.

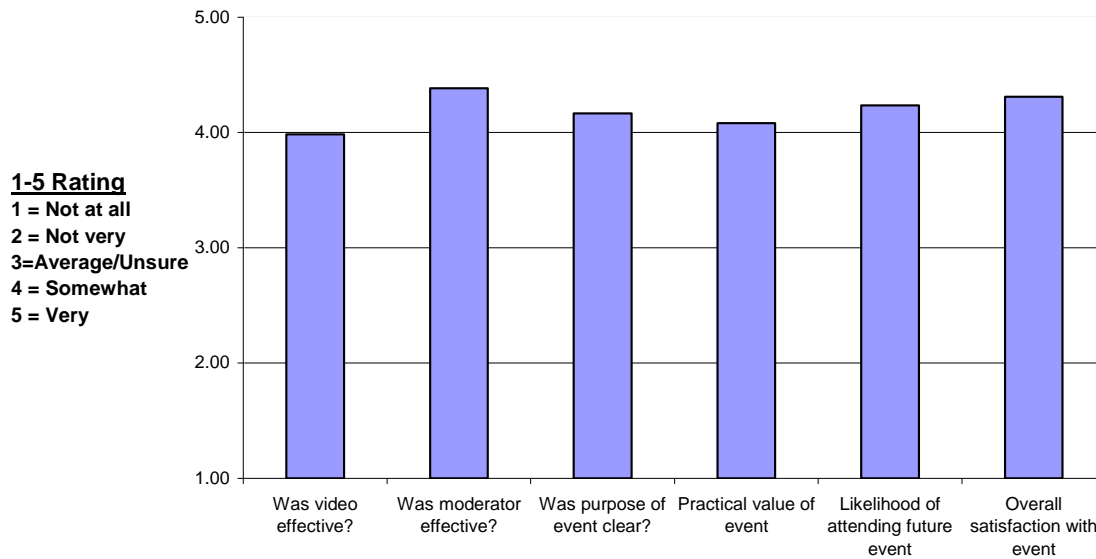
- Getting filled in on others' opinions, knowledge, and experiences gives me more to think about. We are sheltered here in our area and don't have the experiences that people from other states with more immigrants have.
- With being able to see faces attached to opinions it helps to shape the realities of this topic.
- I came away with a better understanding of other peoples' fears.
- I came away thinking we must take action to solve the problems.
- I did not pay too much attention to this topic prior to this forum because I wasn't personally involved with immigration, but now I realize that it is going to be a big issue in the general election.
- Our forum was interesting because it included a person who had actually gone through the process of becoming a citizen.
- I came away feeling our nation needs a more comprehensive immigration policy with stronger enforcement mechanisms but also more and faster pathways to citizenship.
- Although I do not think differently after participating, my views have been expanded.

### Rating of Immigration Town Meeting Survey

In addition to the NIF Post-Forum Questionnaire, WIPPS distributed its own survey, "Rating of Immigration Town Meeting Survey," to garner feedback on the logistics and efficacy of the event itself. The questions asked on this survey included:

- Was the opening video effective?
- Was the moderator effective?
- Was the purpose of the event clear?
- Rate the practical value of the event
- What is the likelihood of your attending a future event?
- Rate your overall satisfaction with the event

### Rating of Immigration Town Meeting



In addition, the survey asked: *What did you like and what did you dislike about the town hall meeting on immigration?*

Written responses follow below:

#### Likes

- The way the program was conducted
- Diverse views
- All of it
- I learned a lot
- The pace and progress
- The openness of the forum
- The civility of the conversation
- Good exchange of ideas, especially because there were some I had not spent much time thinking about
- Very open to ideas and to reform
- There were no agendas pushed
- The views presented were complex
- There was good participation
- One could speak one's mind and feelings without fear of others disliking them for their opinions
- Brought up ideas which had previously not been presented
- Freedom to state your own personal opinion, positive or negative
- The opportunity to be heard
- The opportunity to have our thoughts get to our government officials

- I liked that the seating position allowed eye contact
- I liked the fact we wore name tags and could refer to each other by name
- I liked the “three approaches” format
- The facilitator did a great job, as did the note-taker
- The moderator did a great job at getting at lots of ideas
- Liked the cultural diversity discussion

### Dislikes

- The time of day the forums were held (I work second shift)
- Some people monopolized the conversation - take better control
- That it was limited to 90 minutes (120 would be better)
- Thought that sometimes words were being put into our mouths
- We needed to use the process of raising hands to speak
- Some people did not participate or wear name tags
- No time to generate an action plan
- Did not like that there were news cameras at my session
- Did not like the news reporter at the session
- The feeling of not really having the power to make a change
- Some people are very ignorant
- The discussion was too light; didn't dig deep to get to root causes
- Didn't like negative and opinionated statements
- Views on whether the fence will help
- Nothing said about corporations using immigration to drive wages down

## **LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE DIALOGUES ABOUT THE NIF PROCESS**

(Reflections from Moderators/Note- takers/Observers)

### Length of Event

An hour and a half is not long, particularly if that includes introductions, ground rules, a video, and other business. The challenge is trying to balance the reality of people's busy lives with the ideal deliberation timeframe. We need to carefully consider what is absolutely essential and what can be discarded. In the end we decided to stick with 90 minutes because that is what we advertised and what participants seemed to expect. In our first event, a couple of people left as we pushed the time limit and it proved to be slightly disruptive when people left. However, at Athens, the discussion was lively and we went over time, with most people willing to stay an extra few minutes. The short time frame does mean that the moderator has to really focus on areas of agreement and disagreement and policy options and values. There is not much time for really dealing with trade-offs and the "what are you willing to live with" type of question. But maybe we can weave more of this in as we proceed. In the end, we think that a two hour timeframe is more conducive to achieving our goals, but for this series we stayed with the 1.5 hour format.

### Using a Video

Did we need the video?

Pro: it is unlikely that citizens will have read the NIF materials beforehand; the video provides a nice introduction which introduces the three approaches; it serves as an icebreaker or opening point of discussion for the moderator; if we do not use the video, the moderator may well have to give a similar introductory review of each approach anyway.

Con: we might be underestimating our audience's knowledge about the immigration debate and whether or not they had read the NIF material; it takes time away from discussion; it requires extra logistical planning and set up. We decided to incorporate into our evaluation sheet (after the first dialogue) a question concerning the perceived utility of the video. We will likely continue showing videos (when available from Kettering) and collecting data to be used to decide on the value of the video in future NIF forums.

### Framing the Issue

We had some concerns about how the immigration issue is framed in the booklet. We felt the approaches needed to be sharper and better focused, especially because there was a great deal of overlap. To help clarify our deliberations, we gave each approach specific titles and noted that these approaches represent lenses by which to view the issue.

### Introduction of Participants

We had the option, but did not take it, of having participants introduce themselves at the beginning of the event. This decision was arrived at, primarily, to reserve as much time as possible for discussion. Again, there are trade-offs.

### Ground Rules

The question became, should we go over ground rules or is it sufficient to post them on the wall? At the first forum we went over them, at the second we did not. The second group (Athens) seemed more familiar with one another and appeared to be quite civil. In an attempt to save time, we skipped the ground rules. Perhaps in the future we can simply note them (we have a poster with them that we hang prior to the deliberation). If we get larger turnouts in more urban areas, it might be good to go over them.

### Survey/Questionnaire

The importance of taking the survey (and turning it in at the end of the meeting) could have been highlighted more. This is an important part of our data collection. We forgot to do this the first time around, but we did remember this in our second meeting. The survey we generated, "Rating the Town Hall Meeting," was useful in providing feedback about the actual mechanisms for how we delivered the forums. One question (#5: "*Likelihood of Attending Future Event*") was not clearly worded enough to produce the data we were looking for, as it could have been interpreted by respondents as asking whether they would attend a future event on *immigration*, or a future *NIF Town Hall Meeting* event.

### Improving Dialogue

The moderator needs to try and include everyone in the discussion—and be aware of those who are not so they can be drawn in (where possible). This is challenging because it requires making sure the conversation itself is continuing in a productive way while being aware of group dynamics, individual body language, etc. The moderator must be careful not to become the authority figure on the topic (while retaining authority as the arbiter). This is a real challenge and will undoubtedly take practice. But, no matter how tempting, it is important that the questions be answered by participants rather than the moderator. If people in the group cannot offer an answer to the question, then the moderator can step in and rephrase the question or perhaps say something to the effect of “this is an area that needs additional research or information before we can answer it. Let’s note that we would like more information on this topic and move on.” The note-taker can then find an appropriate place to note that the group desired more information on that topic. This is an important tool also for our final report because it helps us understand what the public might need in order to make effective choices. However, sometimes it is useful to put forward some information or data as a means to get the conversation moving.

### Note-taking

The note-taker needs to be careful to distinguish positions on issues from underlying values. Though both are important to know in the end, they should not be confused. The note-taker needs to put comments about approaches on the wall as we move along so that everyone can see them and refer to them if necessary

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Kettering Foundation. Framing Issues for Public Deliberation – A Curriculum Guide for Workshops.

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## **MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE EVENT**

### **Press Release Sent to Local Media**



518 South 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Wausau, WI 54401

### **Press Release**

Judi Wittkopf · 715-261-6296 · Fax 715-261-6333 · E-mail [judi.wittkopf@uwc.edu](mailto:judi.wittkopf@uwc.edu)

## **Wisconsin Institute for Public Policy & Service partners with Marathon County Public Library to hold town hall meetings on immigration**

**For Immediate Release: Monday, January 14, 2008**

**Contact: Eirc Giordano, Director of Wisconsin Institute for Public Policy & Service, (715) 261-6388**

### **Pertinent information:**

- Wisconsin Institute for Public Policy & Service (WIIPPS) to partner with Marathon County Public Library to hold town hall meetings on immigration
- Meetings will be held in Athens, Edgar, Hatley, Marathon, Mosinee, Rothschild, Spencer and Stratford at the Marathon County branch libraries, and in Wausau at the Marathon County public library
- The topic will be “The New Challenges of American Immigration: What Should We Do?”
- Sessions will be moderated by Eric Giordano, WIIPPS director, or Jim Veninga, chair of the WIIPPS advisory board
- The purpose is to discuss some of the basic tensions underlying the debate over current and future U.S. immigration policy
- Results of the discussions will be shared with local and state officials, as well as with several national organizations encouraging local discussions, including the Kettering Foundation and National Issues Forums

In collaboration with the Marathon County Public Library, the Wisconsin Institute for Public Policy & Service, located on the campus of the University of Wisconsin-Marathon County, will sponsor a series of town hall meetings throughout the County on the topic, "The New Challenges of American Immigration: What Should We Do? "

Each town hall meeting, approximately 90 minutes in length, will give those attending an opportunity to discuss the merits of various options that have been proposed for dealing with immigration issues. Sharing moderating responsibilities will be Eric Giordano, Institute director and assistant professor of political science, and Jim Veninga, a member of the Institute advisory board and associate professor of religious studies.

Town hall meetings will be held on the following dates at the public libraries in the municipalities indicated:

- Monday, February 4, Edgar, 5:00-6:30 p.m., at the branch library
- Tuesday, February 5, Athens, 6:00-7:30 p.m., at the branch library
- Monday, February 11, Rothschild, 6:30-8:00 p.m., at the branch library
- Monday, February 18, Mosinee, 6:30-8:00 p.m., at the branch library
- Monday, February 25, Spencer, 6:30-8:00 p.m., at the branch library
- Tuesday, February 26, Hatley, 6:00-7:30 p.m., at the branch library
- Monday, March 10, Stratford, 3:30-5:00 p.m., at the branch library
- Monday, March 17, Marathon, 6:00-7:30 p.m., at the branch library
- Monday, March 31, Wausau, 7:00-8:30 p.m., at the Marathon County Public Library

This series of town hall meetings seeks to address some of the basic tensions underlying the debate over current and future U.S. immigration policy. Do the costs of our immigration policy outweigh the benefits? Is change necessary? If so, how will we arrive at a manageable strategy for change? What are the major tensions and stumbling blocks to creating a workable national policy? What does the current status of U.S. immigration policy mean for Wisconsin? What changes are in the best interests of Wisconsin and in particular Central Wisconsin?

"The unique part about these discussions is that they are to be held by and for residents of our communities," said Eric Giordano, director of the Wisconsin Institute for Public Policy and Service. "The purpose of these public dialogues is to provide an opportunity and a means for citizens to share their views with one another and to identify both shared and competing values."

Americans have championed the United States as a nation of immigrants, a place of refuge for those persecuted and a land of opportunity for those seeking new beginnings. Yet current immigration policy--and the enforcement of that policy--is widely debated, a central issue in this year's presidential contest.

At this moment, thousands of people who live south of the U.S. border are contemplating illegal entry into the United States. Many will successfully make the journey, as have hundreds of thousands before them. In the U.S., work is plentiful and immigrants (documented and undocumented) are successfully finding a means of improving their lives. Service and

agricultural sectors of the economy have welcomed the addition of inexpensive labor, even if national laws have not.

While most Americans believe that historically immigration has strengthened the United States, many now wonder whether current immigration laws and unchecked illegal immigration is becoming a substantial drain on American resources. States and even local laws are emerging to try and address what is normally a federal responsibility.

“Through these and future dialogues, we hope people will understand that their voices matter,” said Giordano. “To this end, we plan to share the general results of these town hall dialogues with local and state officials, as well as with several national organizations encouraging local discussions, including the Kettering Foundation and National Issues Forums,” he added.

### **Poster of Immigration Forums**

Wisconsin Institute for Public Policy & Service and Marathon County Public Libraries to hold town hall meetings on

# The New Challenges of American IMMIGRATION

## What Should We Do?

**PUBLIC INVITED**

Let your voice be heard at this series of town hall meetings which seeks to address some of the basic tensions underlying the debate over current and future U.S. immigration policy.

**HELD AT THE MCPL BRANCH LIBRARIES:**  
 Monday, February 4, Edgar, 5:00-6:30 p.m.  
 Tuesday, February 5, Athens, 6:00-7:30 p.m.  
 Monday, February 11, Rothschild, 6:30-8:00 p.m.  
 Monday, February 18, Mosinee, 6:30-8:00 p.m.  
 Monday, February 25, Spencer, 6:30-8:00 p.m.  
 Tuesday, February 26, Hatley, 6:00-7:30 p.m.  
 Monday, March 10, Stratford, 3:30-5:00 p.m.  
 Monday, March 17, Marathon, 6:00-7:30 p.m.

**HELD AT THE MARATHON COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY:**  
 Monday, March 31, Wausau, 7:00-8:30 p.m.

Do the costs of our immigration policy outweigh the benefits?  
 Is change necessary? If so, how will we arrive at a manageable strategy for change?  
 What does the current status of U.S. immigration policy mean for Wisconsin?  
 What changes are in the best interests of Wisconsin and in particular Central Wisconsin?  
 What are the major tensions and stumbling blocks to creating a workable national policy?  
 Does immigration contribute to a national identity crisis, or is it the backbone, historically, of our nation's strength?  
 Do immigrants strain the public resources, or do they help build a brighter future for America?

Dr. James Veninga and Dr. Eric Giordano will lead these FREE discussion sessions.

Wisconsin Institute for Public Policy & Service  
 UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN MARATHON COUNTY  
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 Funded in part by a grant from the Wisconsin Foundation Council, with funds from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Additional funding provided by the National Endowment for the Humanities. The Wisconsin Foundation Council supports public programs that engage the people of Wisconsin in the important issues of our state.

## Wausau Daily Herald Coverage of Immigration Forums

# Immigration forums set

## UWMC group invites people to join conversation

By Robert Mentzer  
 Wausau Daily Herald  
[mentzer@wdhprint.com](mailto:mentzer@wdhprint.com)

A series of conversations about immigration in central Wisconsin will be launched at Marathon County Public Libraries next week with the goal of bringing people together to discuss the range of perspectives on a complex issue.

Immigration was a "latent issue" before it exploded onto the national stage in 2007, said Eric Giordano, a political science professor at the University of Wisconsin Marathon County. The town hall meetings will give people an opportunity to discuss their views on how governments ought to deal with the economic and cultural questions surrounding both legal and illegal immigration.

"The whole purpose is to have citizens feel like their voices can be heard," said Jim Veninga, a UWMC religious studies professor, who will moderate the first meeting Monday in Edgar.

The meetings are sponsored by the Wisconsin Institute for Public Policy and Service with the Kettering Foundation. The group will use an open format that allows participants to speak freely without pushing toward a prescribed set of solutions.

"Our goal is to listen," Giordano said.

The group will prepare a report on input gathered at the nine meetings and submit its report to the national Kettering Foundation and policymakers.

"We can't promise that they will change the policies," said Veninga, who hopes the process will help people become more engaged in the process.

Jean Greenwood, an associate lecturer in the UWMC English department, said she personally has known undocumented immigrants who are employed in the service and agricultural sectors in central Wisconsin, and she hopes the meetings will prompt people to share their stories.

"What is your personal experience? We're all experts on our own experience," she said.

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Posted April 6, 2008

## Immigration forums move forward



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Discussion over, but next steps aren't defined

By Robert Mentzer  
Wausau Daily Herald  
[rmentzer@wdhprint.com](mailto:rmentzer@wdhprint.com)

A series of nine town hall forums on immigration Marathon County now are finished, and organizers and attendees are moving toward a next step: How to convert discussion into action.

The forums were sponsored by the Wisconsin Marathon Institute for Public Policy and Service at the University of Wisconsin Marathon County. They delved into all aspects of immigration in the United States with a goal of educating people, gathering opinions and debating the topic at grassroots levels.

"This issue is not going to go away," said Wix Covey, a Wausau activist for peace and social justice who attended a forum discussion in Wausau last week. Covey, who works with the Northwoods Peace Fellowship, said discussions are important, but they should lead to new policy.

"Otherwise it is just chatter," Covey said. "It's useful chatter, but you can reach a stalemate."

The immigration forums did reveal a hunger in area communities for conversation on the issue. People braved sometimes-stormy weather to attend, and some came to more than one session to discuss the issues.

"It certainly did create a different level of dialogue than I have seen," said Jean Greenwood, an associate

lecturer in the UWMC English department. Greenwood attributes this to the forums' model, designed by the Kettering Foundation's National Issues Forum, which encourages participants to weigh the competing interests involved in different approaches to immigration policy.

For future community forums about different issues, UWMC political science professor Eric Giordano spoke of holding a "wrap-up session" following the initial dialogues that would allow participants to reflect on what the next step would be.

"One of the questions is, will they continue to come if all it is is a dialogue?" Giordano said.

As designed, the dialogues themselves are not geared toward creating specific action by citizens.

"We're a research organization," said Mary Kring, a Kettering Foundation communications specialist. "We don't ever say, 'This is the answer to this problem.' We want to find out how people deliberate. Our mission is to try to find out how to make democracy better."

The format of the discussions, particularly those held in some of Marathon County's rural communities, led people to discuss a topic that may not usually come up over coffee, organizers said.

"It's a town hall forum setting, and the places we've been to have been small, population-wise," said Debbi Warren, 48, a UWMC student who volunteers for WIIPPS. "You're there with your neighbors. ... Does that keep you in check with your opinions? Am I more likely to disagree with you? Or, because I could see you on the street, do I tone it down?"

In fact, the conversations tended to encompass a range of viewpoints. In Wausau last week, the topic of the barrier that is being constructed on the U.S.-Mexico border was brought up. Some attending reacted strongly against the fence, comparing it to the Berlin Wall. Others, like Neil Short, 86, of Wausau, were strong advocates of it.

"I want a 2,000 mile double-fence," Short said.

That diversity of opinion is one reason that moving beyond a discussion is a challenge. In some forums, there was not a clear-cut consensus of the direction immigration policy ought to take.

For Giordano, the purpose of the discussions is simply to "allow people to participate in democracy." And even if a specific action plan on immigration was not developed, that framework of that participation can pay dividends.

According to Kring, in some places the same model for discussions has been applied to local issues.

"They'll say, well, you know, the national issues are fine, but we're desperate here in this community because of our water problem" or other local issues, Kring said.

In that way, discussion does not always lead to more discussion, but sometimes has concrete results.

"The more people we get that buy into at least talking about it, the better," Covey said. "The big picture on immigration is ... changing the concept that everybody you see is illegal to seeing them as human beings."

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### Reader Comment

Mon Apr 07, 2008 11:28 am

and the only way to take away the jobs is to fine those that hire them. I mean a substantial fine that makes the risk of paying slave wages not worth it.

### Take Away the Jobs!

Mon Apr 07, 2008 10:05 am

If you take away the jobs, they will go back to where they came from!

If that is done, we don't need a Multi-Billion Dollar fence that will be penetrated anyway.

As the owner of a small business, I cannot hire anyone without a Social Security Number. How do others get away with this? Pay Cash, I assume?

Illegal Means Illegal. Immigration must be done properly otherwise our once great nation is lost!

The U.S. Government - If it ain't broke, they'll break it!


### Reader Comment

Sun Apr 06, 2008 11:55 pm

I see examples of a lot of common misconceptions within this thread. First off, keep in mind that it is not just Mexicans that are here illegally; there are people here from all over the world. And don't point the finger at left-wing liberals. I am pretty conservative, definitely republican, but some things I have learned as I have researched illegal immigration have caused me to re-think my stance on the whole situation.

Some illegal immigrants don't even know that they are here illegally. They were brought here by parents when they were infants or toddlers, and they never learned their native languages or cultures. They grow up believing that they are of a minority heritage but assuming they are just as American as their friends; then they turn 16 or 17 and want to apply for a job, a driver's license, or financial aid for college, and all of a sudden they realize that they don't have American citizenship and can't obtain any of those things. They are faced with the possibility of being deported back to a country that they don't remember and being separated from their families forever, or if they are able to remain in the US, they are stuck in a rut with no way to get a job or higher education. These are the people that I am concerned about. When someone sneaks into the country and gets caught, they are committing a crime and need to be treated as a criminal, just like someone who is caught shoplifting at Kmart is treated as a criminal. But I don't see how we can justify treating those in the situation I described above as criminals...what's a 2-year-old supposed to do? Break away from their parents and run back to their home country?!

# Wausau Daily Herald

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April 1, 2008  
**Section:** Local News  
**Page:** 3A

## Immigration forum series ends with hope for action

*Robert Mentzer*

By Robert Mentzer

Wausau Daily Herald  
rmentzer@wdhprint.com

Many people in Marathon County think federal **immigration** policy is broken. A series of town hall **forums** have given people a chance to talk about how to fix it.

"Almost everyone agreed the system is broken," said Eric Giordano, a political science professor at the University of Wisconsin Marathon County who was involved in organizing the **forums**. The **forums** began a process of conversation that Giordano and other organizers hope can lead to action.

At the Marathon County Public Library on Monday, 19 people gathered to discuss **immigration**-related issues ranging from labor economics to English-only laws.

It was the ninth and final scheduled event, though organizers say they are planning another meeting for UWMC students on April 11. The **forums** were sponsored by the Wisconsin Institute for Public Policy and Service and the Kettering Foundation. Giordano said the meetings, held at all the branch libraries in Marathon County, drew an average of about 12 people. The best attendance was in Rothschild, which drew more than 20.

"I thought the tone of most of the conversations was very respectful," Giordano said. "I would even say surprisingly so."

Jean Greenwood, an associate lecturer in the UWMC English department, said the discussions clearly had an effect on some attendees. Some who came to more than one session had noticeably changed their outlook.

"People were stretching a little bit beyond their comfort level," Greenwood said.

Some of the attendees at the **forums** included farmers and others familiar with the role immigrant labor plays in the local economy.

"One of the things we've heard is how important immigrant labor is to our area," Jim Veninga, a UWMC religious studies professor, told the group Monday.

Giordano and the other organizers plan to report the viewpoints they gathered at the meetings to local and national political representatives. They also will submit a written report to the national Kettering Foundation. But moving from conversation to action is one of the group's continuing challenges.

Giordano said he spoke to a researcher who told him, "The thing that makes this long-lasting and successful is to eventually have action, or at least some groups that spin off from the dialogues themselves. ... Ultimately our goal is to provide a network."



**Copy of Letter Sent to Community  
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Eric Giordano  
DIRECTOR

Jean Greenwood  
PROGRAM ASSOCIATE

To: Good News Baptist Church  
From: Jean Greenwood  
re: Immigration forum in your community  
date: Tuesday, February 5<sup>th</sup> at 6:00p.m.

In collaboration with the Marathon County Public Library, the Wisconsin Institute for Public Policy & Service, located on the campus of UW-Marathon County, will sponsor a series of town hall meetings throughout the county on the topic "The New Challenges of American Immigration: What Should We Do? " Each town hall meeting, approximately 90 minutes in length, will give those attending an opportunity to discuss the merits of various options that have been proposed for dealing with immigration issues. Sharing in moderating responsibilities will be Eric Giordano, Institute director and Assistant Professor of Political Science, and Jim Veninga, a member of the Advisory Board and Associate Professor of Religious Studies.

I would like to extend an invitation to your organization to the upcoming town hall meeting. It will be held at the Athens Branch Library on Tuesday, February 5<sup>th</sup> at 6:00 p.m. This will be a wonderful opportunity for community members to learn more about this important issue. Enclosed are a poster, a flyer, and a copy of the press release promoting the event. If you would like additional posters or a copy of the booklet published by the National Issues Forum that explores the issues to be discussed, contact me @ [jean.greenwood@uwc.edu](mailto:jean.greenwood@uwc.edu) with any questions.

Jean Greenwood  
WIPPS Program Associate  
Enclosure: poster, flyer, press release

## APPENDICES

### “Benefits of Immigration” – Compilation of Participant Comments

- Today’s immigrants came here motivated by the same dreams and hopes as our ancestors
- We must have empathy for those who are victims of persecutions
- Bi-linguality is a benefit to society
- Skilled workers are a plus to our economy
- Immigrants are useful because they will take jobs Americans don’t want
- Even illegals pay taxes
- Immigrants keep the supply of cheap goods plentiful
- Immigrants are good workers
- There is too much red tape for earnest workers desirous of citizenship
- Our area is aware of the positive implications of immigration because of positive experiences with the Hmong immigrants
- Border states need financial help with the challenges of immigration
- The US could gain very qualified workers
- The economy might come to a halt if we deport large numbers of immigrants
- We can increase our investment in immigrants but we must also increase our expectations of accountability for their actions
- Outsourcing is a bigger threat than job displacement
- The real fear (and resultant anger) in our country may not be about immigration so much as it is about the economy and the costs of immigration
- Immigration allows the high standard of living in America

### “Drawbacks to Immigration” – Compilation of Participant Comments

- Earlier immigration in America was mostly about freedom; now it’s about \$\$\$\$
- Current level of immigration far overwhelms anything in the past
- Immigrants come for reasons of self-interest, not persecution
- Mexico needs to take responsibility
- Immigrants take money out of our economy
- Open borders create terrorist opportunities
- Immigrants build political blocks which are a threat
- The cheap pool of immigrant labor lures greedy employers towards corruption
- Immigration erodes our labor union system
- Immigration abuses the Social Security system
- Illegal immigration is unfair to people who play by the rules to become citizens
- Immigration depresses American wages
- It is linked to the drug trade
- Decreases incentives for Americans to find jobs
- Spreads foreign diseases
- Costs our school system
- Assimilation is not guaranteed- creates ethnic pockets
- Farmers in border states face lawsuits by not knowing they are hiring illegals

- The Mexican government profits at our expense
- We need to solve more pressing American problems first – the economy, health care etc.
- Even our current legal immigration system is not controllable
- Illegal immigration doesn't allow us to be selective
- Costs outweigh benefits

#### “Shared Values” – Compilation of Participant Comments

- If we formulate policy, we should enforce it
- Current situation is unfair to everyone
- Decisions should not be based on fear
- All people want the right to assimilate
- America is a tossed salad
- We value individual identities
- There is an “American Way” that all Americans should embrace
- Laws should be respected, but they also can be changed
- We need to define what it means to be American
- It is not good to depend on government hand-outs
- All Americans should speak English
- The economy is not our best guide in deciding what is right to do
- We must recognize the human face and the human needs of immigrants
- Current policies don't reflect American values
- America respects hard workers
- America values cultural unity
- We must uphold democracy and our Constitution
- We honor our history and economic equity

#### “Possible Solutions” – Compilation of Participant Comments

- Create a government sponsored program for employer mentorship programs
- Create an amnesty program for a net profit
- A guest worker program could work
- Expand the global dialogue about the problem and explore policies
- Education is part of the solution
- Help Mexico stimulate its own economy and fix our own policies because sending all immigrants home is unrealistic

COPY OF “PLACEMAT” USED AT FORUMS

# Comparing the Approaches

Unless our heritage is purely Native American, all Americans are immigrants. The first came from Spain, Britain, and France. Some were free. Others came as slaves from Africa. By the nineteenth century that original stream of immigrants had expanded to include people from across Europe — Russia, Greece, and Italy. Today, people come from around the world. They flee persecution, seek better jobs or simply want to reunite with their families. When they get here, they contribute to the definition of "American" culture, but they can be expensive for taxpayers. They need jobs, language classes, and education for their children. By accepting low wages, they can take work away from citizens. And, sadly, some who come to our shores are not seeking a place in America. Instead, like the hijackers of September 11, 2001, they seek to destroy our freedoms and us. Immigration made America, but what do we do about the threats it poses today?

## Approach 1

### America's Changing Face:

#### Is There Too Much Difference?

Limit the number of newcomers. Otherwise, America risks losing its soul, its character and life. When people live in tight-knit communities, when they speak one or two languages and all, some often, they can assimilate. English is the common language of an embrace. If we lose our language, we lose all our other benefits. (Beliefnet.com shared on 10/10/06) *by: Desiderio, September 11, 2001*, proves that some immigrants wish to join America.

#### What Should Be Done?

- Admit fewer immigrants.
- Waive legal economic status depending on immigration, so they can gain.
- Subsidize local governments to subsidize crèches for immigrants.
- Make immigrants, adults and children, learn to speak English.

#### Dangers, Drawbacks, Trade-offs

- We may lose our tradition of tolerance.
- English-only initiatives can cause prejudice against immigrants.
- Immigrants are wages going to the home economy, but their children contribute to adopt America's culture.
- Immigrants keep our country vibrant and adaptable.

## Approach 2

### A Nation of Immigrants:

#### Remembering America's Heritage

Immigration built America. Yes, there are alternatives costs, but overall immigration will keep us great. We cannot abandon refugees who like our freedoms, seek freedom. We must welcome newcomers, but find better ways to support them and help them grow into Americans.

#### What Should Be Done?

- Admit more refugees.
- Give refugees a better chance to gain employment.
- Expand family-sponsored immigration.
- Allow more skilled workers into the country.
- Negotiate a new immigration policy with Mexico.

#### Dangers, Drawbacks, Trade-offs

- Without limits, the labor market in America could collapse, lowering our life.
- Caring for and educating all of these newcomers costs American taxpayers.
- Americans in low-wage jobs suffer.
- Citizens' wages don't go up because immigrants will work for less.
- Americans lose out on jobs to immigrant competitors.

## Approach 3

### A Matter of Priorities:

Limit the number of newcomers. That might impact those who are already here. In a tight economy, American citizens' disposable income drops, wages go down and even takes jobs away from Americans. We pay higher taxes to support education and social services for newcomers.

#### What Should Be Done?

- Admit fewer immigrants.
- Keep out immigrants who would take jobs from Americans.
- Focus immigration on skilled workers.
- Help out taxpayers in communities where immigrants settle.
- Stop illegal immigration.

#### Dangers, Drawbacks, Trade-offs

- Immigrants get blamed for problems that do not exist.
- People will have no time have from terrorism.
- There will be no workers to do the unskilled jobs Americans refuse to accept.
- Immigrants will be a vital part of the U.S. economy.