

March 29, 2014 6:08PM

Editorial: DeFranco proposes a path to legalization

Marisa DeFranco hopes to be the next U.S. representative from the 6th District and has made immigration reform a key part of her Democratic primary campaign. DeFranco is an immigration attorney — she performed 400 hours of pro bono work to keep a gay man from Uganda in the United States because homosexuals in Uganda receive the death penalty.

So immigration reform makes sense as key issue for her campaign.

DeFranco's position, however, breaks the mold of a progressive Democrat. Voters might expect DeFranco to favor a quick "path to citizenship" for immigrants in this country illegally. Not so.

Instead, DeFranco favors what she calls a "path to legalization." Her plan tries to accommodate the estimated 11 million illegal immigrants currently in the country, including 160,000 in Massachusetts. But it also tries to cope with the continued pressure from undocumented workers trying to enter the country.

Her path to legalization includes immigrants paying a \$4,000 fine, paying back taxes and waiting for green card for 10 to 20 years.

Illegal immigrants would be allowed to stay in the country legally while they waited for their official green card, the key benefit and why any illegal immigrant would apply to the program.

"If people want something bad enough, they will find a way to get into the country legally. It's a privilege and that has to have an associated cost with it," said DeFranco.

DeFranco also hopes to curb future illegal immigration with reform aimed largely at unskilled, undocumented workers and the companies who employ them — thereby fueling illegal immigration.

Her plan calls for an immigration worker category covering "essential" laborers such as farm workers, restaurant workers and hotel workers. Employers would first have to prove they couldn't find U.S. workers to fill the jobs. Then the employers could legally bring in immigrant workers.

The U.S. already has such a plan for professional-class workers such as doctors and engineers, and DeFranco believes a similar program for unskilled workers would fill employer needs and help stem illegal immigration.

At the same time, DeFranco favors tripling or quadrupling fines against companies who employ undocumented workers.

"That's where the penalty needs to be," said DeFranco.

Finally, DeFranco favors beefing up border security as the third prong of immigration reform. If elected, it's doubtful DeFranco could bring any of this up in a bill because Republicans have turned their back on the immigration issue.

Even so, DeFranco has laid out some practical ideas that please neither the far left nor the far right, but that might help solve the country's illegal immigration problem.