

FWD.us hosts panel on immigration reform

By Nancy Dahlberg

ndahlberg@MiamiHerald.com

Immigration reform is not dead but a big show of support is crucial for Congressional passage this year and lives and jobs hang in the balance, said advocates from government, business and technology who took part in a panel discussion Wednesday at Miami Dade College.

FWD.us hosted the forum, which included U.S. Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, U.S. Congressman Mario Diaz-Balart; LIBRE Initiative Executive Director Daniel Garza, Univision Radio and PBS Anchor Helen Aguirre Ferré, National Council of La Raza Chair Jorge Plasencia, and FWD.us President and Founder Joe Green.

FWD.us, started by Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg and others, is an advocacy organization created to help organize the broader tech community in the fight to get comprehensive immigration reform passed as well as other policy issues. Earlier this year, FWD established a chapter in Miami. "We have constructed an organization that takes a pragmatic approach to immigration reform," explained Green at the forum. "We exist to provide support for members of Congress on both sides of the aisle who stick their necks out for immigration reform."

Expanding the high-skilled visa program would create an estimated 18,100 new jobs in Florida by 2020, according to the American Immigration Council. By 2045, approximately \$9 billion could be added to gross state product by expanding the high-skilled visa program, and personal income could increase by more than \$8.7 billion during that time, FWD.us said.

"Immigration reform is not dead because we are working it. I believe we have a 50/50 percent chance of accomplishing immigration reform. Today I think we are on the cusp," said Diaz-Balart, who has been crafting a bill with others in Congress. "We're getting the bipartisan support."

"I think this will get done in a bipartisan manner," added Plasencia. "It's a three-prong strategy calling for action from House Republicans, action from the White House to stop senseless deportations, and action from our community. We need to focus on our community raising their voices. We need to work with the DREAMers in the local communities, and with the faith-based organizations. We need to come together as one community and say, 'this has to happen now.'"