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Erie House Statement on Presidential Address to Joint Session of Congress

Yesterday President Donald Trump delivered his first address to joint session of Congress. During the speech he outlined decidedly anti-immigrant policy ideas, painting a dark picture of immigrants. He affirmed his positions on building a wall along the southern border, expanding efforts to deport undocumented immigrants and restricting immigration and refugee resettlement based on class, religion and country of origin.

He talked extensively about a merit-based immigration system that would seek to exclude potential newcomers based on their wealth, education and skill level, an approach that stands in stark contrast to traditional American values of equality and opportunity for all.

Furthermore, the president blamed immigrants for affecting wage growth and costing American taxpayers billions of dollars each year, citing a study by the National Academy of Sciences.

But even that study concluded that first-generation immigrants have a negligible impact on wages of native-born workers and that second-generation immigrants contribute more to the country's tax base than their native-born peers.

Of course, this overlooks the indispensable role immigrants play in the workforce, in public service, in the military and in the community. Welcoming the diversity of gifts and experiences immigrants bring with them makes our nation stronger, not weaker.

The president also continued using fear-mongering propaganda and tactics, portraying immigrants as violent criminals and gang members. Among those efforts was his announcement of plans to create a new Victims of Immigrant Crime Engagement (VOICE) office, a shameful attempt to promote anti-immigrant sentiment.

The lip service he paid—after days of deafening silence—to the recent shooting of two Indian immigrants in Kansas and a rise in white nationalist activities across the country seemed hollow against the backdrop of unveiling this new office.

At Erie Neighborhood House, we have found a radically different narrative to be true.

Working alongside Chicago's immigrant community over the past 146 years, we have witnessed the profound contributions immigrants make to their newfound home.

Immigrants become leaders at home, in the workplace, at school and in the community.

Immigrants inspire hope for future generations and collectively make America stronger.

At Erie House, we will continue to stand in solidarity with immigrants and refugees in our community, across our country and around the world, providing them with the resources and support they need to achieve a better life for themselves, their families and their neighbors.

Kirstin Chernawsky, Executive Director
Erie Neighborhood House