



GlobalPDX Podcast

Episode 5 - The Predatory Promise

Andrea Johnson

Hello, and welcome to the GlobalPDX podcast. Just like many of you, we have settled into our virtual working world and are trying to stay positive, creative, and engaged during such challenging times. We are so excited to continue this podcast, and provide connection to Oregon's Hub of Global Changemakers. My name is Andrea Johnson, I'm the Chair the GlobalPDX Advisory Board, and the Executive Director at *Green Empowerment*. In today's podcast we are joined by Jennifer Martinez board of directors at Repatriate Our Patriots. Repatriate Our Patriots is a nonprofit dedicated to bring deported US veterans back home and halting current deportations of US veterans. Jennifer is a public affairs and policy candidate at PSU, and is a sister of a deported veteran. Her full bio is available on the GlobalPDX.org website. Jennifer, thank you so much for joining us today.

Jennifer Martinez

Andrea, and the GlobalPDX group, thank you so much for having me and creating some space to talk about this issue of deported veterans.

Andrea

Why dont you start by explaining to our audience the problem that your organization is trying to solve, because I don't know if everybody's familiar with it.

Jennifer

Absolutely: the military has failed to uphold their promise of citizenship made to immigrant veterans, and promising citizenship in return for military service is a predatory practice that has consumed bodies and energies of non-citizen immigrants and in wars across the globe. Veterans that can mend on their own are discarded it in virtually erased through deportation. So what our organization tries to do is remind government to uphold your end of the bargain by a mediately repatriating veterans that have been deported, and really preventing this from happening to another service member. We are sounding the alarm to expose the hypocrisy to the public, and provide some support for veterans that have been deported, and are living through deportation right now.

Andrea

So for people that aren't familiar with this issue, can you define for us what "repatriation" is, and help us really understand the scope of this issue. How many US veterans does this potentially impact and maybe some definitions for us.



Jennifer

Absolutely, so most people get a visceral reaction when they hear that U.S. veterans are deported from our country. What's really interesting is that because these veterans are deported from a country they were willing to die for, we like to describe them as living in exile.

Repatriation means bringing them home bringing them back home for the country that they fought for. The idea of repatriation should really only be a short-term solution to remedy the damage. Ultimately our goal is that deportation should never be on the table for veterans. Just to give you a quick feel for how many veterans are out there: The U.S. has no idea how many veterans it's deported. So *we don't know*. Based on some research, on the modest end, folks are estimating that there are between 3,000 and 5,000 veterans currently deported across the globe. You know, this is not only better and supported or Latin America Mexico but really all over the world.

Andrea

Wow I mean it's just so surprising to hear I think especially in a country that really claims to be so patriotic and to really value our military and especially service and I think there's a lot of pride in our military service no matter where you sit on the political spectrum often veterans (at least themselves as individuals) have a lot of respect. So how does this happen? Explain the process: how does this possibly happen to somebody who just served our country?

Jennifer

There are a few things at play here and it is pretty complicated. Basically what ends up happening is that legal permanent residents (and in some cases undocumented immigrants) are allowed to join the military. Recruiters are notorious for promising citizenship in exchange for military service. So many recruits take it as being inherent in their contract, right, that they're going to get naturalized; that they're going to get citizenship. Like you mention, this idea of serving your country is the ultimate dream of some of these immigrant veterans, or immigrants service members right? This is that idea of reaching the American Dream, being able to serve your country, like you said "it's patriotic". And so many folks are intrigued by that aspect. But unfortunately what happens is after these young service members sign the paperwork, their naturalization is never actually processed, or they find out that it's a longer-winded process. So that's the scenario at best right: through paperwork never gets processed. At worst some people finish their bootcamps and they are lead to believe, by their commanding officers, that their oath of enlistment is automatically a naturalization oath as well.

Andrea

So does the U.S. military actually have the ability to grant citizenship? I mean that kind of seems like something the military's not able to do (based on my limited understanding of our citizenship process).



Jennifer

Absolutely and that's why we say it's a "predatory promise" because the military doesn't have the ability to grant citizenship. There's actually a shared process by USCIS and already the Department of Defense. But in 2004 Congress also asked USCIS to share that same process with Homeland Security. And so we're talkin about three agencies and so the idea is naturalizing for Veterans is so much more complicated and complex than for a civilian folks just trying to naturalize, and go through that process. So a lot of deported veterans look at this process and are intimidated by it. Because it is an intimidating process. That is something that we think definitely needs to change.

We just heard a story today, published in the Rio Grande Valley in Southern Texas, about a Vietnam veteran ... it took him over 52 years to naturalize after his Vietnam service. He even won a purple heart based on those sacrifices that he made it during the Vietnam war. And still you hear about this journey of veterans taking 50 years to naturalize and that's just completely unacceptable! Definitely what we're arguing, what we're advocating, is that as soon as a military service member enrolls and they finish boot camp, that should automatically mean citizenship.

Andrea

Wow. This is so interesting to hear about just because I think we're not hearing about it that much, I mean obviously there's a lot of news right now, but this feels to me like something that would be across political spectrums. That we would all want to support our U.S. veterans. I'm assuming that when they are deported they're also cut off from any potential veterans support (which is also a promise of serving).

Jennifer

What's happening now is that these deported veterans are organizing in some places (not everywhere, not all across the spaces that they've been deported to) and like you mentioned they are cut off from a lot of those promises that come with military service. They are still eligible for benefits, but they need people to help them with that process because they're far away. And so that ability/capacity for folks to help them through that process is still very limited.

Andrea

So are there laws that allow for this, or don't allow for this, how is this allowed to happen?

Jennifer

So what ends up happening is that oce service members is Veterans come home after serving overseas or doing their tour, you know they're dealing with scars of war really. And they're trying to mend on their own with little support. And so they might have run-ins with the law, and that's how many of these veterans have been deported is because they have some type of run-in with the law and that's when they find out that they're not citizens. That's when they find out that their service was not automatic. And the reason for this is because in 1996, under Clinton, our immigration process and system became more punitive. He enacted several reforms that



increased the number of deportable crimes that even included really mild criminal infractions. That was through the *Illegal Immigration Reform and Responsibilities Act*. And so what happens is that we have veterans deported for a multitude of crimes ranging from a DUI, marijuana cells, very small crimes to some bigger ones, right. But regardless of the severity of the crime, our organization firmly believes that it doesn't matter what crime the veteran committed. At the end of the day service should mean citizenship and therefore deportation should never be on the table for military service members.

Bush, even in 2001, passed an executive order to try to expedite the naturalization process (just going back to that conversation we had a little bit ago). And even Congress in 2004 enshrined some of Bush's executive order into law. But unfortunately the paperwork still gets lost in the process, in the shuffle, and a lot of veterans come out of their service still without their naturalization and their citizenship. And there's been a scathing report by the government accountability office that was sent Congress directly that made it clear that we've done it's a dismal job, not only of keeping track of how many veterans are deported, but we don't even follow our own instructions on how to handle military service members that are going through the immigration process.

Andrea

I think to bring it home for our listeners it is a good time to maybe tell the story about Edwin. We had a chance to hear from Edwin directly and we're going to share a little bit of his story. Could you introduce Edwin, and then we will hear from him directly.

Jennifer

Absolutely. So Edwin Salgado serves on our Board and he is my friend (we started the *Deported Veteran Zine* together). He served as a Marine in Iraq and he grew up in Santa Ana and his whole life basically. So he actually got recruited right out of high school and when he shared his story with me, he tells me that he saw another young man about his age in a military uniform, and that ignited his fire to serve.

Edwin Salgado

My name is Edwin Salgado, I am 39 years old. I was in the Marine Corps, I am a combat veteran. I was deployed to Kuwait. I joined the Marine Corps right after high school when I was 18. I lived in the U.S. since the age of 3. Up until I was deported 4 years ago. I am currently living in Tijuana, Mexico. I have been deported for 4 years and I am happy living here now. What does it feel like to be a deported veteran? It feels like you are no longer wanted or needed by the country that you served. It feels like you're no good any more, like you don't have value anymore. It feels like you are thrown out like trash. Here in Tijuana, I have basically found my own doctors and paid out of my own pocket to deal with my PTSD. But I feel that the VA could do a lot more, for so many veterans that are deported and living in other countries outside of the U.S.



Jennifer

Edwin's story is what inspires me to keep advocating on behalf of deported veterans.

Andrea

Let's get personal for a little bit: how did you get involved in this issue? Are you a veteran yourself or somebody you know?

Jennifer

I'm not a veteran and, you know, I'd like to think that I've been advocating since I was 11 years old (even if I didn't know it yet). My brother joined the army right out of high school and after returning home (he was only about 20-22 years old) and he got into trouble. And he got deported. So my brother is a deported veteran currently living in Mexico still. So I have a personal connection with this. It hasn't really been until now (my later years) where I have just become a little more active in trying to support veterans. You know when my brother got deported we didn't think it'd happen to anyone, we never knew it was on the table! We never knew that after military service people could get deported. My parents are immigrants, I was born here, but all of our family we migrated here. So when you think about military service it makes you think of reaching that dream, right? The quintessential American ideal: being patriotic, things like that. So when we learned that... you know we were all really proud of my brother and we were so happy for him, but when we learned that when he got in trouble that that could actually deport him, we were just shocked. To add insult to injury, my brother after he was doing time, he actually got his N400 (his citizenship naturalization paperwork), but at that point you know he was already doing time and he was already in the process of deportation. So that naturalization paperwork came a little late for him. And that was just really disheartening because my brother went through all the motions. My brother was willing to die for the country and, yeah, he got into when you should be held accountable for it. But deportation is really like paying twice for your crime. And deportation weighs on you in so many ways. It separates you from your family, it separates you from any type of cultural connection and identity, and it's lonely and it's a long process.

Andrea

So when he got deported where did he get deported to? If he had lived in the US for all of his life, where did he go if his family was here?

Jennifer

My brother moved here when he was 2 years old. He could fit into the description of a "dreamer". When ICE Deports you they just leave you at the Mexican border from Mexico (if you're a citizen of Mexico). And so he was just thanked for his service and he was just dropped over in Tijuana. He had been locked up, he had done time for like three three four years, and so



then you're suddenly just on this Border in Tijuana where you have no connection you don't know anyone. My family is from Central Mexico and that's where we still have family at, so he had to figure out a way from Tijuana, with the clothes on his back, to make it all the way home I guess to Central Mexico. That was a journey and thankfully my parents supported him however they could, but my parents were Farm Workers and so we don't have a lot of money to support him and it was a really difficult time. Ultimately he to live back with my grandpa (which he's technically my uncle but he's acting like a Grandpa to all of us). And so you can only imagine in central Mexico you don't have a lot of ties to you as you don't see the culture as much as you would on those border states and border cities and so he was just completely cut off. It was a hard process, and it's still a hard process with a lot of ups and downs. And sometimes you know my brother's not doing too good, and sometimes he's doing better.

Andrea

And how long ago was this? Just to give folks an idea, and he's still deported (is what I'm hearing).

Jennifer

Yeah my brother got to put in 15 years ago and so it's been 15 years still no we don't see any ending in sight so...

Andrea

Wow so what would need to happen for this to change?

Jennifer

So there are many Bills currently sitting in Congress waiting for more sponsorships. So honestly we need a federal law, and this is where it gets tricky. We think that the deportation of veterans is primarily a better a veteran issue, but then it gets caught up in our immigration system and it becomes really difficult to advocate for change that we need more co-sponsorships on. Some of those range from bringing veterans back home, to at least providing more support. What needs to change (what we need for this actually change from what's happening now) is we need people to call their representatives! We hate saying that because it is so difficult, but we are a small organization in St. Helens Oregon and it gets difficult to advocate across the country. The light in this story is that Veterans themselves, with social media now, are getting connected they are advocating on their own behalf. So they're calling their calling Representatives everywhere they're driving across country to talk to people on the campaign trail. Making sure that they commit to supporting veterans. Unfortunately though this has been something that tends to fall on party lines, even though we don't think it should. It's a veteran issue, it's not an immigration issue.



Andrea

It is a hard time, and immigration is such a hot-button topic, I guess you'd say, politically right now. But if you could focus on Veterans issues I could see why that would be so frustrating for your organization as well as for the veteran that you're trying to support.

Jennifer

Exactly. So what we're doing now our organization is trying to create some consciousness. We're trying to reach out to people to just realize: we're actually doing this. So many people don't even know that this happens. We want to implore people to reach out to the representatives you know to ask them to co-sponsor those those letters and of course how else does this change? By being upfront. Making sure recruiters are held accountable and are transparent about so that this doesn't happen again.

Andrea

So we have heard some stories now that feel like older stories, but this is a current issue as well with recruiting practices?

Jennifer

There has been some recruitment practices iqos oil Army right that has allowed and I think Bush allowed the military to go into public schools text if you ask any veteran, especially if they're deported, you know they would serve again. But you know we need to be cautious of where we're doing the recruitment. And if we are doing recruitment in certain schools, in certain Public Schools, then we we just need to make sure people have options on their list. That military service is not the only option if they don't want to (so it's not something that's forced). But if they do serve that there is enough information of what are the facts for them to become a citizen if they needed to.

Andrea

And that they are not falsely assuming that it's a guarantee that they will be Citizens.

Jennifer

Exactly. And I think the GAO report has created some type of committee briefings. People are better recruiters kind of know that this is on the table that this is something that's being talked about, so we do hope that there is Improvement to that process in the future.

Andrea

So in that regard, maybe you could share any positive stories that have happened recently, any successes on with this fight? I mean I know that 3,000-5,000 potentially is quite a big number



but are there any kind of nuggets of hope, or positivity, coming out of the work that you're seeing?

Jennifer

Absolutely just earlier this in early September we had one a veteran that was deported, his name is Frank de la Cruz, and he actually got to come back and naturalize the same day. So we had one veteran that was repatriated that same day. There's one more than might be coming we're not sure yet don't know the full details but so there might be another "Frank" that will get to. But just really quickly about Frank, he was born in Juarez, moved to El Paso, also moved here when he was about 1-2 years old and he enlisted in the US Navy and was a legal permanent resident (even served during the Persian Gulf War). He got into trouble because he got caught drinking and driving. And so he was deported to Mexico twice, in congregation that was about 20 years of deportation to Mexico. Thanks to ACLU San Diego that're doing a lot of work, Jenny Pascerella helped Delacruz file for citizenship in 2016 and the reason why he was able to come back after being deported, the reason he was able to come back and naturalize, was because in 2004 US Supreme Court decision of Florida made it to that driving while intoxicated is not one of the list of crimes that gets you deported. That's how he got a chance out of deportation and what Jenny told us is that there are a lot of "Frank's" out there and it sounds like there might be one more veteran that will be repatriated soon (in addition to Frank).

Andrea

Well thank you so much is there anything else that you want to share about Repatriate out Patriots before we sign off today?

Jennifer

Yes you could look at our website (.Org) follow us on Facebook follow us on IG and Twitter and get involved! We're always looking for volunteers, are always looking for board members so if you are committed to this cause be on our Board.

Andrea

Wonderful well thank you so much Jennifer for being a global changemaker and bring you this really important issue to our attention. I hope that our listeners can, just despite everything else going on, this is just another important issue for us to be aware of it and to take action where we can. For those listening we really appreciate you sticking with us during these challenging times GlobalPDX is dedicated to keeping you connected and engaged. For resources from this podcast in or check out our website. If you aren't already a GlobalPDX member please consider joining our community, and feel free to email Communications@GlobalPDX with any questions. Stay tuned for new episodes of our podcast.