

# CHATHAM County Line

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▶ DIANNE FLINN ON RESOLVING  
FOR A MEANINGFUL NEW YEAR

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## Can Undocumented Immigrants “Go Home and Get in Line” for a Visa?

by Nora Haenn

translated by Luis Melodelgado  
en español (in Spanish), back page

Politicians and pundits often like to say undocumented residents should return to their country of origin and “get in line” to sign up for a visa. In 2016, the United States issued some 8,900,000 visas, so it sounds possible the estimated 11 million undocumented people in the United States might secure one of these. Yet under the U.S. system, visitors apply for different categories of visas. The United States offers 34 kinds of visas for everyone from tourists, to religious workers, to international students and others. This system means there is no single line of entry, but many lines, each with its own qualifications. The system also means that for people who do not qualify for any of the existing visas, there is no line.

I learned this lesson from the experiences of my friend Samuel. Samuel lives in Mexico with his wife and four children. He has travelled without documents a few times to work

as a roofer in Alabama. Samuel comes from a family of peasant farmers. His roofing job in Alabama paid him in a single hour twice the amount he earned in a whole day in Mexico. Like many labor migrants, Samuel worked in the United States a few years, built up his savings, then returned to Mexico. He likely would have kept up this circular migration if the Great Recession hadn't put many Alabama roofers out of work.

As a manual laborer, if Samuel wanted to enter the country on a work visa, he would have needed a U.S. employer to sponsor him for an H2A or H2B visa. The H2A visas apply to temporary jobs in agriculture. The H2B visas apply to temporary work in construction, landscaping, and seafood processing. Another US industry that relies on immigrant labor is tourism which explains why President Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort hires people on H2B visas. According to the Department of Labor, employers who bring in employees under these programs “are required to engage in positive recruitment of U.S. workers” and demonstrate that foreign nationals “will not have an adverse effect on

the wages and working conditions of similarly employed U.S. workers.”

Why didn't Samuel secure an H2A or H2B visa? Simply put, he did not know they existed. The number of these visas issued each year is relatively limited, and Samuel did not have any contacts to the employers who hire under these categories. In 2016, for example, the number of H2B visas issued for all 50 United States was 84,600. That year, U.S. jobs in construction numbered 1.5 million. The construction industry in Alabama alone employed roughly 88,000 people. If Samuel had chosen to work in agriculture, his chances of getting a visa would not have been much better. In 2016, the United States issued a total of 134,000 H2A visas. The number of farmworkers in the United States is an estimated 1 million with 384,000 people categorized as “seasonal labor.”

Samuel needed contacts to sponsor him on the visas, but also to help him fill out the visa application. The forms must be completed in English, a language Samuel does not speak or read. The application asks for a person's home address, but Samuel lives in a rural community

where neither street names nor house numbers apply. In recent years, the U.S. Department of State has adopted an on-line system, so visa applications must be submitted electronically. Samuel has no experience with computers.

If there had been a line where Samuel could have queued up for a visa, I have no doubt he would have. But for him, there was no accessible legal path to entry.

Although Samuel lived and worked in Alabama, his example offers lessons for North Carolina. North Carolina ranks third in the nation in its use of H-2B visas. Our state also ranks third in the use of H-2A visas. North Carolina has a number of employers who would hire documented workers if they could. For those employers the lack of a line also has consequences, although to date the cost of U.S. immigration policy has largely been born by migrants like Samuel.

*Nora Haenn teaches anthropology and International Studies at North Carolina State University. Luis Melodelgado has been living in Chatham County since 2007. He loves working for the community.*

## Pittsboro for Paris—Mayor Perry Voices Support for Climate Agreement

by Tommy Johnson

On June 1, 2017, President Donald Trump announced his intention to withdraw the United States from the Paris climate accord. On December 5, 2017, Pittsboro Mayor Cindy Perry joined 45 American mayors as well as some foreign mayors at the North American Climate Summit. She joined them in signing the Chicago Climate Charter, an agreement to uphold the tenets of the Paris climate accord regardless of the actions state or federal governments take.

At the summit, Mayor Perry joined Knoxville, Tennessee Mayor Madeline Rogero as one of only two Southern mayors in attendance. Mayor Perry participated in a panel discussion with the mayors of Milwaukee and San Francisco, representing the small town perspective on the national stage. The summit was a call to action for local governments and she has hit the ground running.

“One of the most powerful ideas at the Mayors Climate Summit in Chicago was that local governments have a major role in creating the demand for climate-friendly actions,” she said in an email to Chatham County Line, “The Mayors who have signed onto the protocol represent over 40 million constituents,” many of whom are committed to some form of environmental stewardship. For Perry, supporting the Paris accords is quite simply fulfilling her obligations to her constituents, saying that she would not characterize the summit as partisan or political.

Thus far, Perry's actions have included communicating with other politicians and the business community and drafting proposals that might inch Pittsboro closer to being a more climate-friendly town.

Mayor Perry will speak to the Board of Commissioners about the summit on February 19. She also expects to make a presentation to the Town of Chapel Hill and another to



The table asked for a wine with kind of a climate disaster bouquet, so I recommended the 2017.

Chatham Park. She calls Chatham Park an opportunity in regards to becoming a greener community. She cites their commitment to provide electrical vehicle charging stations in commercial districts and to each residence as well.

Alongside Chapel Hill Mayor Pam Hemminger, Mayor Perry is encouraging our Congressional delegation to support a climate fee and dividend legislation, or a bill that would place a steady, rising price on carbon where all fees are in turn distributed to households as a monthly energy dividend. To that end, she met with Congressman Mark Walker's (R,

NC-06) District Director last month, though his office says no specific legislation was discussed.

More locally, the Mayor has enacted the sorts of small changes that she sees essential to fighting climate change. She pledges to get more electric vehicle charging stations installed and has spoken to the business community about installing solar panels on their properties. She has asked Pittsboro's public works staff to try and reduce their herbicide use and she also plans to propose a no-idle policy for town vehicles. At town board meetings, they will no longer use Styrofoam cups.

One of Mayor Perry's major points of action is to design a new, carbon neutral town hall, with solar panels and smart utility meters, electronic devices that record energy consumption.

Mayor Perry brings an unfaltering optimism to the issue of climate action, noting that Pittsboro has long been at the forefront of the green movement, from solar panels to organic farming and the buy-local movement. “There is no reason we cannot lead the way on climate issues too,” she said.

For Perry, global climate change did not originally seem like a high priority for such a local role as Pittsboro mayor. She recalls a mayoral candidate forum where the first question she was asked regarded climate change. Originally, she did not see how she could make a difference.

“Now, however, I see that the key to combating climate change is a small, discrete series of steps which may not be headline grabbers, but which, in combination with larger steps by the State and Federal Governments, can bring real results,” she said, “We must do what we can, where we can!”

*Tommy Johnson is a native Pittsborian of 20 years and a sophomore at Kenyon College in Gambier, OH studying politics and Arabic.*

## Citizens Need to Act to Save Arctic National Wildlife Refuge

by Joe Jacob

I want you to imagine, if you will, a time when you were looking out at what you thought was wilderness. Close your eyes, picture yourself there and try to remember how you felt. You could have been standing at the edge of the Grand Canyon or hiking in the Smoky Mountains. Maybe you were on the beach looking out over the Atlantic Ocean or rafting down a wild river out west. You might even have been hiking in federally designated wilderness areas along the Appalachian Trail from Georgia to Maine. I bet that when you were having those experiences, and now just thinking about them, you felt a sense of peace and at one with all that there is. Whenever I am challenged by someone to put a value on wilderness, I think back to my wilderness experiences and what they have meant to me. I know that whenever I feel insane in this chaotic world, all I have to do is remember that feeling of peace and connection. I am lucky. I don't physically have to be in wilderness to experience it or know it is there.

I am not naive to think that everyone feels that leaving areas in a wilderness condition is as important as I do. Soon after the passage of the Wilderness Act by Congress in 1964, I attended a conference in New Orleans that brought together federal agencies responsible for managing wilderness areas, timber representatives from both the lumber and paper industries, and conservationists. The purpose of the conference was to see if there was some agreement on the need to identify and protect additional areas in the Southeastern United States. At the time, most of the areas that might qualify for wilderness designation were on lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service and the Service seemed to be resisting identifying those lands. As defined in the Wilderness Act, “a wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.”

I will never forget when a representative from the timber industry got up and said “I am not worried about setting aside

millions of acres of forest land in federally protected wilderness because I know that when we really need the timber, as a society, we will mine the rafters in churches if we need lumber that badly”. As a society, I think we are close to being willing to do just that in an Alaskan wilderness because of what was contained in the federal tax legislation just signed into law.

The law not only favors the wealthiest individuals in our society, but it also opens up the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil and gas exploration and production. For over 40 years, conservationists have fought to have the refuge off limits to development in order to protect its wilderness character, the calving grounds for the Porcupine caribou herd, dening areas for polar bears and the Gwich'in native people who depend on the caribou for both physical and spiritual sustenance. If you have doubts as to whether or not oil and gas activities will have devastating effects on the wilderness character of the Refuge, please go to a December 15, 2017 *New York Times* article entitled “Here's What

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