

Court Grants Law License To Man In U.S. Illegally

Ruling Could Open Door For Other Professions

BY JASON DEAREN

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — The California Supreme Court granted a law license Thursday to a man who has lived in the U.S. illegally for two decades, a ruling that advocates hope will open the door to millions of immigrants seeking to enter other professions such as medicine, accounting and teaching.

The unanimous decision means Sergio Garcia, who attended law school and passed the state bar exam while working in a grocery store and on farms, can begin practicing law immediately.

It's the latest in a string of legal and legislative victories for people who are in the country without permission. Other successes include the creation of a path to citizenship for many young people and the

granting of drivers licenses in some states.

"This is a bright new day in California history and bodes well for the future," the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles said in a statement.

The court sided with state officials in the case, which pitted them against the White House over a 1996 federal law that bars people who are in the U.S. illegally from receiving professional licenses from government agencies or with the use of public money, unless state lawmakers vote otherwise.

Bill Hing, a law professor at the University of San Francisco, said the court made clear the only reason it granted Garcia's request is that California recently approved a law that specifically authorizes the state to give law licenses to immigrants who are here illegally.

The new law, inspired by Garcia's situation, took effect Wednesday.

It was unclear how many people would qualify to practice law under the ruling and whether it would influence other states. Legislatures and governors in more conservative states such as Alabama and Arizona are likely to be less receptive to the idea.

Garcia, who plans to be a personal injury attorney in his hometown of Chico, said he hoped the decision would serve as a "beacon of hope" to others in the same situation.

He "can hang up a shingle and be his own company," said Hing, who represented the state bar association in the case. "Once he does that, a client can retain him as a lawyer."

But some questions remained unresolved, such as whether Garcia can appear in federal court or in other states. Federal law makes it illegal for law firms to hire him.

Chief Justice Tani Cantil-Sakauye, who wrote the opinion, said the new state law removed any barrier to Garcia's quest for a license. And no other federal statute

"purports to preclude a state from granting a license to practice law to an undocumented immigrant," Cantil-Sakauye wrote.

Garcia, 36, arrived in the U.S. as a teenager to pick almonds with his father, who was a permanent legal resident. His father filed a petition in 1994 seeking an immigration visa for his son. It was accepted in 1995, but because of the backlog of visa applications from people from Mexico, Garcia has never received a visa number.

He applied for citizenship in 1994 and is still working toward that goal.

The U.S. Department of Justice argued that Garcia was barred from receiving his law license because the court's entire budget comes from the public treasury, a violation of the federal mandate that no public money be used to grant licenses to people who are in the country without permission.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Daniel Tenney, who argued the case, did not immediately return a call seeking comment.



MICHAEL TERCHA/CHICAGO TRIBUNE/MCT

Toni Zakarija, 25, shovels the sidewalk Thursday at her home on Evergreen Avenue in Wicker Park, Chicago.

'What A New Year's Gift'

Strong Winter Storm Moves Onward, Pushes Into The Northeast

BY RODRIQUE NGWU AND JOHN CHRISTOFFERSEN

Associated Press

BOSTON — A storm expected to bring more than a foot of snow, stiff winds and punishing cold pushed into the Northeast on Thursday, extending Christmas break for some students while posing the first test for New York's new mayor and perhaps the last challenge for Boston's outgoing one.

Some schools in New England and New York closed well ahead of the snow, while cities mobilized plows and salt spreaders, and state offices sent workers home early. Some major highways were ordered shut down overnight. U.S. airlines canceled more than 2,300 flights nationwide on Thursday in advance of the storm.

The heavy weather began rolling in just a day after New York Mayor Bill de Blasio was sworn in to lead the nation's largest city and a few days before Boston Mayor Thomas Menino ends 20 years in office.

Menino announced a parking ban and said schools would be closed Friday in Boston, where up to 14 inches of snow

was expected. Boston's airport said it would not handle any flights after 8:30 p.m. Thursday.

"What a New Year's gift, to receive one last snowstorm as mayor," said Menino, whose successor takes office on Monday.

De Blasio, who as public advocate in 2010 criticized his predecessor Mayor Michael Bloomberg for his handling of a post-Christmas storm, said hundreds of plows and salt spreaders would be on the streets as soon as the snow started falling Thursday night.

"We have to get it right, no question about it," de Blasio said. "We are focused like a laser on protecting this city and getting everyone ready. We have all hands on deck."

Snow began falling overnight Wednesday in parts of New England and New York state, but the brunt of the storm wasn't expected until late Thursday. Forecasters said temperatures would plummet, with some areas seeing highs just above zero and wind-chill readings of minus-10 and colder.

The National Weather Service issued a blizzard warning for Cape Cod, coastal areas north and south of Boston and part

of Maine as well as New York's Long Island, where 8 to 10 inches of snow could fall and winds could gust to 45 mph.

Fourteen to 18 inches of snow were forecast, with up to 2 feet in some areas along the Massachusetts coast.

"We're going to see a lot of snow and a lot of wind," forecaster Jason Tuell said. "We're concerned about whiteout conditions possibly tonight with the blowing and drifting snow."

Massachusetts Gov. Deval Patrick said Thursday night state offices that closed early Thursday would remain closed on Friday. He said National Guard members and state police were on standby for any high tide flooding overnight or Friday in vulnerable coastal areas, but no mandatory evacuations have been ordered.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo ordered three major highways in New York, stretching from Long Island to Albany, to close overnight Thursday. He said the highways should reopen at 5 a.m. Friday.

Efforts were underway to get homeless people off the streets of New York City and Boston and into the warmth and safety of shelters Thursday evening. Outreach teams in New York were looking for people who needed beds in shelters.

Confusion, Relief Mark Start Of ACA

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — The new year brought relief for Americans who previously had no health insurance or were stuck in poor plans, but it also led to confusion after the troubled rollout of the federal health care reforms sent a crush of late applications to overloaded government agencies.

That created stacks of yet-to-be-processed paperwork and thousands — if not millions — of people unsure about whether they have insurance.

Mike Estes of Beaverton, Ore., finally received his insurance card on Dec. 27 after applying in early November. Still, the family was thrilled to have insurance through the Oregon Health Plan, Oregon's version of Medicaid, because their previous \$380-a-month premium "literally crushed our family's finances," Estes said.

Obama administration officials estimate that 2.1 million consumers have enrolled so far through the federal and state-run health insurance exchanges that are a central feature of the federal law. But even before coverage began, health insurance companies complained they were receiving thousands of faulty applications from the government, and some people who thought they had enrolled for coverage have not received confirmation.

Tens of thousands of potential Medicaid recipients in the 36 states relying on the federal exchange also are in limbo after the federal website that was supposed to send their applications to the states failed to do so.

At Least 5 Dead In Explosion In Beirut

BEIRUT (AP) — An explosion tore through a crowded commercial street Thursday in a south Beirut neighborhood that is bastion of support for the Shiite group Hezbollah, killing at least five people, setting cars ablaze and sending a column of black smoke above the Beirut skyline.

It was the latest in a wave of attacks to hit Lebanon in recent months as the civil war in Syria increasingly spills over into its smaller neighbor. The violence has targeted both Sunni and Shiite neighborhoods, further stoking sectarian tensions that are already running high as each community in Lebanon lines up with its brethren in Syria on opposing sides of the war.

The Lebanese army said 20 kilograms (44 pounds) of explosives were placed in a dark green SUV. It said authorities were investigating how the explosives were set off.

A security official said that human remains were found in and around the vehicle, and that authorities were investigating whether the blast could be a suicide bombing. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to brief the media, said a DNA test will be conducted to try identify the person who was in the car.

Lebanon's official National News Agency said at least five people were killed and more than 50 wounded in the explosion, which left the mangled wreckage of cars in the street and blew out the windows of store fronts. The director of the Bahman Hospital, where dozens of the wounded were taken, said some of the injured were in critical condition.

Kerry: Mideast Peace Accord Possible

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu blasted his Palestinian partner in peace-making efforts on Thursday, accusing him of embracing terrorists "as heroes," harsh words that clouded the start of Secretary of State John Kerry's tenth trip to the region to negotiate a peace deal he claims is "not mission impossible."

Kerry arrived in Israel to broker negotiations that are entering a difficult phase aimed at creating a Palestinian state alongside Israel. He had dinner with Netanyahu and planned to be in the West Bank on Friday to talk with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. Kerry is asking both leaders to make tough, highly charged political decisions in hopes of narrowing differences on a framework that will outline a final peace pact.

Netanyahu greeted Kerry at the prime minister's office and joked that it had been a long time since he'd seen him. But after the initial small talk, the Israeli leader took aim at Abbas. He claimed Abbas' homecoming for Palestinian prisoners released from Israeli jails earlier this week had led more Israelis to wonder if the Palestinians seriously want to find a way to end the decades-long dispute.

"I know that you're committed to peace," Netanyahu told Kerry. "I know that I'm committed to peace, but unfortunately, given the actions and words of Palestinian leaders, there's growing doubt in Israel that the Palestinians are committed to peace."

Netanyahu was referring to events surrounding Israel's release on Tuesday of more than two dozen Palestinian prisoners convicted in deadly attacks against Israelis. Netanyahu has faced political pressure from Israeli hard-liners for agreeing to release a total of 104 Palestinian prisoners as part of the U.S.-brokered package to restart the peace talks.

Warning Issued About Oil Shipped By Rail

BY MATTHEW BROWN AND JAMES MACPHERSON

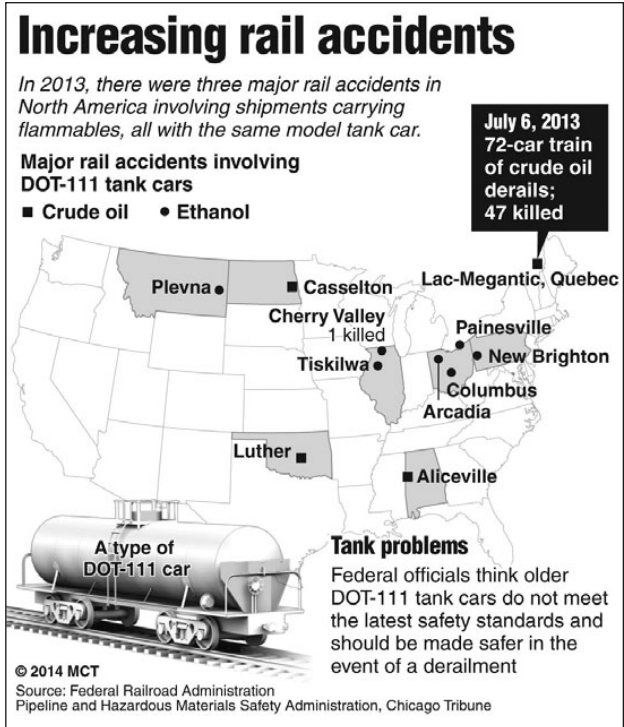
Associated Press

BILLINGS, Mont. — Following a string of explosive accidents, federal officials said Thursday that crude oil being shipped by rail from the Northern Plains across the U.S. and Canada may be more flammable than traditional forms of oil.

A safety alert issued by the U.S. Department of Transportation warns the public, emergency responders and shippers about the potential high volatility of crude from the Bakken oil patch. The sprawling oil shale reserve is fueling the surging industry in eastern Montana and western North Dakota, which is now the nation's second-largest oil producer behind Texas.

Thursday's announcement declares that the Bakken's light, sweet crude oil may be different from traditional heavy crudes because it is prone to ignite at a lower temperature. Experts say lighter crudes, which contain more natural gas, have a much lower "flash point" — the temperature at which vapors given off by the oil can ignite.

The government's warning comes after a huge explosion on Monday caused by a crude train derailment near Casselton, N.D. No one was



hurt, but worries about toxic fumes prompted the evacuation of hundreds of residents from the small eastern North Dakota town.

The oil boom in the Bakken has reduced the nation's reliance on imported oil and brought thousands of jobs to the region. But as companies increasingly rely on trains instead of pipelines to get that oil to lucrative coastal markets, public safety in communities bisected by

rail lines has become a major concern.

In July, 47 people were killed in Lac-Megantic, Quebec, when a train carrying Bakken crude derailed. Another oil train from North Dakota derailed and exploded in Alabama in November, causing no deaths but releasing an estimated 749,000 gallons of oil from 26 tanker cars.

By comparison, there was no fire when 10,000 gallons of

oil that originated outside the Bakken region leaked after a Canadian Pacific Railway derailment in Minnesota last March. Cleanup crews were able to scoop up much of the spilled crude, which the railway said came from western Canada.

Whether the government's response to the latest derailment will help stave off another accident is uncertain. While safety advocates welcomed the move, others said the warning didn't offer new information.

"It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that Bakken oil is a high-quality crude with a lower flash point — that's what makes it a desired commodity for all these coastal refineries," said Ron Ness, president of the North Dakota Petroleum Council, a Bismarck-based group that represents hundreds of oil industry companies.

Ness added that companies shipping oil from the Bakken already were adhering to federal regulations.

Casselton Mayor Ed McConnell agreed that there was no surprise in the federal government's assessment that Bakken crude may be more volatile.

"The important thing and the intent here is to keep pressure on the federal and state government to make things safer," he added.

GOT NEWS?

Call The P&D At 665-7811

Wewant to make you a loan!

\$100 - \$3000

GENTRY FINANCE
228 Capital • Yankton
605-665-7955

CONVENIENT LOAN
1818 Broadway Suite D-1 • Yankton
605-665-1640