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A deportation crisis

May 23, 2008**By Jenny Andreasson
The Voice**

Miriam Beck doesn't know if her unborn baby is OK.

What the Scottish woman does know is that if she doesn't get a special shot next month her body will produce antibodies that could kill her baby. It already happened last year to her unborn twins, whom she carried dead unbeknownst to her for 10 weeks before severe pain brought her to the emergency room.

She would go see a doctor, but there's one problem — her application for U.S. citizenship keeps being denied. Without a social security number, she cannot access health care. Medicaid has been denied to her even though her husband is a U.S. citizen.

Stuart Beck was born here but grew up in Scotland where he met and married Miriam five years ago. The couple moved to Oviedo in 2005 with Stuart's three children, who are 6, 9 and 13, in search of the American Dream, but all they've experienced so far are nightmares.

"I pay my taxes," Stuart said. "All I want is my country to help me to help my wife and my unborn baby."

Three years ago, Miriam filed for permanent residency, which took 18 months to be processed only to come back denied because she was married to an American citizen and should have used a different form.

The U.S. Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services office received 1.4 million applications for naturalization this fiscal year, according to its Web site, almost double what it received last year. This slowed processing times to 16 to 18 months. In March, that was improved to 14 to 16 months.

When Miriam filed for a change of status, she was again denied because immigration officials said she wasn't married to an American. They refused to recognize her Scottish marriage certificate, she said.

She has been unable to get answers from Citizenship and Immigration Services, so she turned to Oviedo-based Congressman Tom Feeney for help. She said a member of Feeney's staff told her she needed to fly to London because she was an illegal immigrant. If the family left,

though, her husband could not work because he is not a citizen in the United Kingdom.

Pepper Pennington, a spokeswoman for Feeney's office, said their office was trying to point out all the options Miriam had available to her. "Obviously a pregnant woman isn't going to fly over to London," she said.

Feeney's office could not give the Becks legal advice, Pennington said, but they helped manage the couple's way through the immigration maze.

"The Becks' case highlights all the red tape," she said. "This clearly shows that our immigration system is broken."

Miriam paid \$400 to file for a green card three years ago. Now the fee is \$1,010, plus the couple has sought help from an immigration lawyer whose fee is an additional \$1,000 — money the struggling family doesn't have.

Stuart is a master carpenter who is trying to build up his small business, Becks Custom Trim, but his income can't support five — soon to be six — people. Miriam is beyond frustrated that she can't contribute. "Every bill in this house is backed up," she said. "You don't know what I would do to be able to flip burgers."

The Becks don't understand why it's been impossible for them to make a decent life for themselves in the "Land of Opportunity." Stuart works nonstop but still can't pay the bills, their personal belongings are still in a storage container in Scotland — everything in their rented house has been donated to them — and now their unborn child's life is in jeopardy.

Miriam, who is six months pregnant, needs a shot of Rhogam by the end of June to combat the antibodies her RH-negative blood type produces. A doctor was seeing her despite her economic situation, but his office called her last Thursday to say they won't continue to help. Calls to that office were not returned.

Ten minutes after she got the bad news from the doctor's office, the electricity in the couple's Oviedo home was cut off. "We are trying to do the best we can but every door keeps slapping us in the face," Miriam said. "I've cried so much I have no tears left."

Besides the bills they can't pay and the lawyer they can't afford, the couple owes a hospital thousands of dollars for removing the dead twins from Miriam's womb last year. The hospital sends the couple notices of the owed payment. "I know my babies are dead. You don't need to tell me every three weeks," Miriam said.

Despite the rollercoaster they've been on, the young couple is still standing strong, together. They enrolled their younger children at Lawton Elementary School in Oviedo, where they met "their adopted family," Sandy and David Ribakoff.

Sandy, who is a native of England, went through a similar plight to get her citizenship in the early '90s, so she understands the Becks' situation. Sandy and her husband have gone as far as to co-sign on the Becks' car because Stuart didn't have any credit.

Miriam remains so selfless that when she had to pick whether to pay the car bill or buy groceries one month, she chose to pay for the car because she didn't want to affect their friends' credit.

The Ribakoffs say they wish they weren't the only ones helping.

"Let's make the situation everyone's problem," Sandy said. "This is an Oviedo family. People need to open their hearts to them. She matters and we need somebody to care."

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