

Williams: A Mormon's view on Immigration

Policy hard-liners cut against the grain of official church positions

by Daryl Williams - Oct. 22, 2011

Many of my friends and family are supporters of both securing Arizona's border and deporting undocumented immigrants. I often hear, "What part of illegal don't you understand?"

There is good reason to have secure borders. Criminals and others intent upon mischief should be excluded from the country. But why restrict those who come to work and contribute to the economy of the United States - those who want to live free, like my ancestors, free to succeed or fail?

What has made America great?

I believe in our free-market system and hope it survives our trend toward statism. I want to live in a country where we can rear our children in freedom, where one can worship, or not, according to conscience. Where one has the freedom to prosper. It is free enterprise, freedom from government interference, that inspires the American dream.

A free market affects immigration. One of the great hypocrisies of the truculent drumbeating by so-called conservatives who argue for free enterprise is their insistence that we regulate or eliminate a source of labor: immigrants.

The Cato Institute and the *Wall Street Journal*, bastions of conservatism and free enterprise, on the other hand, regularly publish articles on the inimical effects of restricting immigration and tossing out en masse those who are here without paperwork.

According to the Cato Institute, "The overriding impact of immigrants is to strengthen and enrich American culture, increase the total output of the economy and raise the standard of living of American citizens."

Milton Friedman, the economist who inspired President Ronald Reagan, agreed with that. So did free-market economist Friedrich Hayek, who defended capitalism against the socialist propensities of Keynesian economics.

I do not like Arizona's immigration laws and the jingoism of political leaders who ignore traditional crimes - acts with evil intent that disrupt social peace - in favor of a populist approach toward "illegals." Arizona's zealotry on this issue contradicts the underpinnings of free enterprise.

But there is another and more important reason I dislike our current immigration policies. I am religious. I am a Christian. I am a Mormon.

George Washington's farewell address says, "Of all the dispositions and traits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports. . . . Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education . . . reason and experience both forbid us to expect that a national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle."

Can God be pleased with the once unseen but now fenced borders that separate his children? Our political prosperity and economy are suffering because we are losing our religious or moral compass by passing socialistic laws that interfere with our market economy and our morality.

Arizona Senate Bill 1070 is one of these laws. The mantra of "obeying the law" just because it is "the law" cannot justify bad laws. Mormons should not obey such bad laws. Our founding fathers rightfully flouted the bad laws of King George. Rosa Parks disobeyed a bad law by refusing to give up her seat to a White person and move to the back of the bus. The people who harbored Jews to save them from the death camps disobeyed bad laws. Indeed, morality requires all Christians to look beyond sound bites like "obeying, honoring, and sustaining the law."

The Mormon Doctrine and Covenants says, "We believe that the commission of crime should be punished according to the nature of the offense . . . according to their criminality and their tendency to evil among men . . . and (that) for the public peace and tranquility, all men should step forward and use their ability in bringing offenders against good laws to punishment."

Mormons and other Christians who advocate sealing the borders and the mass deportation of immigrants are out of sync with the official position of the Mormon Church and Christianity's universal tenet that we are all God's children.

Evil-minded criminals should be arrested and punished. Keep them out. Keep terrorists and enemies of the United States out, too.

But we should not restrict the immigration of honest, hard-working people who come here for the same reason our ancestors came: freedom and the chance to succeed. Does it really matter that they do not have proper paperwork?

Our history, the free market, empirical data and the morality of our founding fathers recognize that these people are net contributors to our prosperity. Let's welcome immigrants for the seasoning they add to the stew served from America's melting pot.