10 huge flaws in Trump's immigration directives

Jennifer Rubin

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One hardly knows where to begin in describing the flaws in the batch of immigration actions President Trump announced on Wednesday. Here are 10 for starters:

1. This is more hysteria unrelated to actual border conditions. As the Wall Street Journal editorial board put it, "Border apprehensions were 192,000 last year, but that's down from 981,000 a decade ago. Pew estimates that about 11.1 million unauthorized immigrants live in the U.S. (3.5 percent of the population), and 52% are Mexicans. That share is falling every year amid rising illegal entries from Asia, Central America and sub-Saharan Africa. Most of these aliens arrive legally but overstay their visas." This is an expensive, counterproductive agenda in search of a problem.

2. The terrain of much of the border is not conducive to fencing.

3. Trump's obsession with the southern border and relative indifference to visa overstays suggests a bias against certain illegal immigrants. Trump thinks Mexican immigrants are "killers" and "criminals," while apparently never having used such invective against other illegal immigrant groups.

4. A physical wall is duplicative, ineffective and unnecessary. Cato Institute scholar David Bier explains that we have more than 600 miles of border fencing already. Moreover, "Tunnels are typically used more for drug smuggling, but they are still a serious vulnerability in any kind of physical barrier." Walls can be defeated by ladders and ramps. Zero evidence exists that a wall is a cost-effective means of stemming illegal entry. ("Despite the importance of this question, apparently no estimate of the impact of the current border fence on illegal immigration exists at all, let alone a comparison to other technologies. This is despite more than a decade to conduct such a study for the recent fences, and even longer to study the earlier fences.")

5. This is a boondoggle of the worst sort. "For the full 1,000 miles, Trump's 30-foot wall (with a 10-foot tunnel barrier) would cost $31.2 billion, according to the best estimate from Massachusetts Institute of Technology engineers-that is $31.2 million per mile," as Bier notes.

6. Building a wall will be a huge expansion of federal power and land, reinforcing Republicans' long-standing complaints that the feds gobble up too much state land.

7. Trump actually is making apprehension and deportation of criminals harder. The Obama administration already prioritized deportation of violent criminals. An immigration lawyer explained to me that contrary to the Obama administration, the Trump order "prioritizes nearly everything." He points out, "Labeling every person a 'priority' is like highlighting every word in a textbook." Since resources are finite, Trump increases the chances that a truly violent criminal won't be deported. When those people commit new crimes, Trump's scattershot policy will be partly to blame.

8. There is no way Mexico is going to pay for the wall. Trump's statement that U.S. taxpayers wouldn't pay the cost has morphed into a word salad. "Ultimately, it will come out of what's happening with Mexico," Trump told ABC's David Muir. "We're going to be starting those negotiations relatively soon, and we will be in a form reimbursed by Mexico." We have no idea what this means.

9. The notion of a "sanctuary city" is a misnomer. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents are free to apprehend individuals wherever they want. We are talking about the extent to which local law enforcement can be required to devote resources (e.g. hold illegal immigrants in jails) and whether, for example, it demands a warrant from the feds. Who is going to monitor and decide whether the cities are living up to the requirements? What if the federal government and cities disagree on whether the local authorities are being sufficiently cooperative?

10. If the federal government cuts off aid to cities, shortfalls in everything from schools to roads to anti-poverty programs to health care (what about Medicaid costs for people in those cities?) will be attributable to Trump's policy. When people "die on the streets" or shootings increase in a city, there will be a convenient person to blame: Trump.

There are dozens of other reasons not to pursue these policies, including the damage it will do to relations with Mexico. Whatever you think about illegal immigration, Trump's approach — like much of what he does — makes for good PR with his base but is rotten policy for the United States.