



On immigration, Trump is willfully ignorant

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Is it just me or does anyone else get the feeling that President Trump and others in his administration don't see any difference between unauthorized immigrants and those residing in our country legally?

This seemed obvious in his first immigration-related executive order — halted by the courts — barring refugees and citizens from seven Muslim-majority countries from entering the United States for at least 90 days. In the days before the ban was stopped, border agents were making no distinction between people arriving on various visas and those with legal permanent residency in the United States (also known as green card holders) or those holding dual citizenship.

If the changes to current immigration policies that were leaked in the form of draft executive actions last week ever become law, it will underscore the Trump administration's core belief that all immigrants — and not only unauthorized ones — are problematic to our country and need to be thinned from our ranks.

In addition to speeding deportations for unlawfully present immigrants, the leaked memos set off worries among immigrant advocacy groups that legal immigrants who access public assistance could be deported. And that individuals who are otherwise eligible for green cards could be denied admission to the U.S. if they were determined to potentially become eligible for any kind of means-tested government assistance.

To be clear: The Associated Press debunked the myth that such an executive order has been signed, but the fear and confusion are palpable.

At the very core of the bias against immigrants, be they legal or not, has been a constant drumbeat from the far right that has, for over a decade, referred to immigrants as insects and vermin. Most recently, Trump himself has referred to Latino immigrants as rapists, drug dealers, gangbangers and, generally, prone to violence.

Though these persistent myths have been debunked over and over, in an environment teeming with rampant and freely shared fake news it is more important than ever to push out legitimate unbiased information about immigrants.

For starters, the foreign-born commit fewer crimes than U.S.-born people — this is settled fact going back at least a century.

Further, when researchers at the University of Massachusetts and the University of Texas at Dallas investigated whether there was any possibility that the foreign born were simply lying about their interactions with law enforcement, they found that not only do immigrants not have a greater tendency to underreport their offenses, they paradoxically over-report arrests. (Perhaps this is because of misinterpreting ordinary interactions with police, but the researchers have not found conclusive evidence of why this phenomenon occurs.)

According to 2013 data from the Cato Institute, low-income immigrants use public benefits like Medicaid or the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly the Food Stamp Program) at lower rates than low-income native-born citizens.

And they're not all low-income. In fact, U.S. Census data show that foreign-born citizens out-earn native-born citizens. This shouldn't come as a surprise; just look at rosters of medical professions, university faculty and high tech companies.

Lastly, it must be said that even the natives of our southern neighbor aren't as poorly off as some would have you believe. Like the United States, Mexico has lots of poverty, crumbling infrastructure and a public education system that needs serious help — albeit on a far larger scale.

But over the last decade, Mexico has seen a huge rise in its middle class, in addition to a large number of wealthy Mexicans. And they enjoy just as many gleaming high-rises, world-class museums and fancy restaurants as upper-class Americans.

Far from being filled with hordes of "bad hombres," some of them, like 20-year-old Yair Israel Pina Lopez, get recruited by the U.S. government when it looks beyond borders for the "best and brightest." Pina Lopez was selected by NASA to participate in a simulated Mars landing in Utah at the Mars Desert Research Station this spring.

It seems that our president is willfully ignoring the differences between different types of immigrants, lumping them all into one low-value pile. But everyone else who lives in the real world where both their housekeepers and their surgeons are lawfully present immigrants shouldn't get off so easy.

They need to remember that in addition to being an important part of America's history, legal immigrants are a vital part of our present and our future.