



Trowbridge: Immigrants deserve pathway to citizenship

By Ron Trowbridge

March 8, 2014

English writer G.K. Chesterton once observed that some things are so big that many won't see them. My thesis is that pathways to citizenship for screened immigrants who are in the U.S. illegally and who meet certain requirements are consistent with conservative Republican principles. It therefore follows from this thesis that the intense, mean hostilities toward these immigrants in the recent primary and likely on to the November election are taking Texas in the wrong direction.

Let's look at hard data.

Seal the borders. Not fiscally possible - unless multi-billions of dollars grew on trees. In addition, a Government Accountability Office report states that it would take "10 to 15 years" to construct such a sealed border for our 2,000-mile southern boundary. Moreover, 40 percent of immigrants living in the country illegally enter through authorized means - visas. But they overstay their visit. Elsewhere, the Wall Street Journal reports that "Hispanic growth in the U.S. isn't being driven by newcomers but by birthrates among those already here."

E-Verify. It is often difficult for employers to determine applicants' legal status. Social Security cards can be bogus, and many questions asked of applicants may violate the Equal Protection Clause of the U.S. Constitution. What's more, E-Verify lists provided by the federal government are woefully incomplete and are vulnerable to identity theft. The Journal also has reported that "up to 1.3 million U.S. citizens and legal workers will be mistakenly flagged for problems if E-Verify passes." It is very expensive and time-consuming for employers to rectify mistakes that are not of their making.

Taxes. Immigrants here without legal permission pay sales taxes and property taxes, either as homeowners or renters. The Center for Competitive Enterprise reports, "In 2004, the IRS estimated that 6 million unauthorized immigrants file tax returns each year. The Social Security Administration assumes that half of all unauthorized immigrants pay Social Security taxes

(which they do not get back at retirement). A large 2006 survey of unauthorized immigrants ... found that 75 percent had taxes withheld from their paychecks, filed tax returns, or both."

Job displacement. Immigrants living in the country illegally do not displace American workers, especially in low-skilled, arduous jobs where there is a worker shortage - as, for example, in farm labor where crops would otherwise rot, thus driving up consumer costs.

Deport illegal immigrants. Of the nearly 12 million immigrants who are in the U.S. illegally, Immigration and Customs Enforcement has been deporting some 400,000 or roughly 3 percent each year. It would take an ICE staff of unimaginable size and expense to locate and deport millions more. Fiscal Times recently reported that "last year, we spent \$17.9 billion on immigration enforcement, compared to \$14.4 billion on all other principal criminal-law enforcement." Deporting millions more immigrants is just not going to happen.

What's more, Fiscal Times reports, "Currently there are 1.1 million cases before immigration courts. More than half of all federal prosecutions are now for immigration-related offenses." And courts are backlogged for years. Furthermore, police officers in pursuing immigrants are diverted from other criminal priorities, and illegal immigrants do not cooperate with authorities in reporting more serious crimes. They are afraid and hide in the shadows.

With the Hispanic population growing immensely, Fiscal Times editorializes, "The GOP has to figure out the immigration puzzle, or risk death by demography."

Education. A Cato Institute report citing a National Research Council study concludes, "Immigrants and their descendents represent a net fiscal gain for the United States. The typical immigrant and all of his or her descendents represent a positive \$80,000 gain to the government. An immigrant with more than a high school diploma (plus descendents) represents a \$198,000 gain, one with a high school diploma a \$51,000 gain, and one with less than a high school education a \$13,000 loss."

What's more, a 2011 Kauffman Foundation study reports that an immigrant is twice as likely to start a company as an American born here. Companies hire people.

Our American culture. To argue that more Hispanics will ruin our culture is not to know American history. America is both a melting pot and a tossed salad: We are Americans with individual identities.

Crime. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce reports that "crime rates are lowest in states with the highest immigration growth rates. In 2006, the 10 states with the most pronounced, recent increases in immigration had the lowest rates of crime in general and violent crime in particular. Immigrants are much less likely to be behind bars than native-born Americans."

Path to citizenship: "Amnesty" for those entering the U.S. illegally drives millions of Americans to anger. But what's a workable alternative? Pathways to citizenship for certain screened immigrants who now are here without legal permission would enable our country to levy fines, collect back taxes, and put these immigrants on tax rolls for future payment of taxes. If we refuse

these screened pathways, we spite ourselves. We are then mandating a vastly wider de facto amnesty by inaction: the immigrants hiding in the shadows.

By granting screened amnesty, we get half a loaf in fines and future taxes - which is better than no loaf. If my conservative brethren continue mean hostilities toward these immigrants into the November election, they are endorsing bad economics - hardly a Republican trait and certainly not the right path for our future.

Trowbridge, appointed by President Ronald Reagan to direct the international Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs at the U.S. Information Agency, is a Lone Star College system trustee.

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