



Immigration Coverage: The Biased Leading the Clueless

By: Mark Krikorian - December 10, 2013

Politico ran a piece the other day on White House fears that Obama will share the political blame if the current amnesty push fails — i.e., that his attempts to pin all the responsibility on the Republicans won't be successful. It was an interesting look at the tensions between the administration and its outside pro-amnesty supporters, and it's worth a look. But one sentence struck me as shedding light on a broader problem with media coverage of immigration:

The White House is very touchy about any criticism from its allies for Obama's deportation policies, which have sent away more people during his tenure than all other presidents combined.

The factual assertion here is simply false. No matter how you calculate the number of people "sent away," it's simply not true that Obama's done more than "all other presidents combined." The Excel files are online for anyone to check. Table 39, here, shows that during just the Clinton and Bush administrations, Fiscal Years 1993–2008, about 2.9 million foreigners were "removed" (that's the category used when referring to "deportations"). That's compared to fewer than 2 million so far under Obama, and even that's the result of statistical trickery, as my colleague Jessica Vaughan has explained. In addition, during those years 19.7 million illegals were sent back across the Mexican border (formally known as "returns," many of those representing the same person sent back multiple times), compared to something like 2.1 million such returns under Obama. And again, this is just the two prior administrations, not "all other presidents combined."

This isn't a tangential matter. The advocacy groups are pressuring Obama to unilaterally stop all deportations (see the #Not1More campaign, for instance) and the claim about "record deportations" is a central talking point in this effort.

The problem here isn't just a factual error on the part of a reporter; we all make mistakes. Nor is the problem that a political reporter (Reid Epstein is part of Politico's White House team) isn't familiar with the details of a policy area he's writing about; the White House deals with every imaginable issue, and a reporter writing about an administration's political machinations can't be a specialist in all the policy issues.

Rather, this error highlights the media's gullibility on immigration. Too many reporters and editors unthinkingly see the anti-enforcement groups' views as normative, and just assume their statements of fact are correct. This isn't just because the reporters are mostly liberals, which is obviously true, but also because the coalition includes lobbyists from both the right and the left. If the Chamber of Commerce, AFL-CIO, Cato Institute, and Center for American Progress agree that we need amnesty and vastly increased immigration, then that must be the "mainstream" position, with the other side being less

reputable. This leads to a woeful, and unjournalistic, lack of skepticism where even baldly false factual claims are repeated without question. You also see this in the endless repetition of non-existent provisions in the Senate bill on paying "back taxes" and "learning English."

Maybe if I repackaged some swampland in Florida as "Immigration Reform Swampland" I could find a reporter to buy it.