

## Curbing immigration is not the answer

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When I listen to the current calls to greatly curb or even cease some types of immigration, the first thought that comes to mind is that our nation has a very short memory. It hasn't taken us long to forget the immigrant roots from which most of us come. And the stories of hope for a better quality of life passed down through generations that explain why many of us, native-born U.S. citizens, are here today.

Our collective amnesia also affects our ability to see the tragedy that inevitably results when we ignore humanitarian crises that necessitate large-scale migration, such as the Holocaust, the genocide in Rwanda and more recently the large number of unaccompanied children migrating from Latin America to escape the violent effects of our lost war on drugs.

Once again our collective anxiety is causing us to look for simple solutions to complex problems. The most simple solution throughout history has been to blame an out-group, or scapegoat. Our current scapegoats appear to be Muslims and immigrants, in particular the most vulnerable among them, refugees.

We draw dubious correlations between their presence, our safety and the economic and social disruption we are experiencing when, in fact, these are most likely the result of rapid advances in technology, the changing demographics of our native-born citizens and environmental stresses globally.

The comprehensive immigration reform we need that supports all who contribute to the prosperity of our nation while protecting our sovereign borders will not be achieved through scapegoating. It can only be created by putting aside party loyalties in order to look to facts rather than political dogma.

In fact, immigrants remain an important part of our economic engine. Consider for example a recent study by the New American Economy, a group comprised of politicians and business people who are Republicans, Democrats and independents. In their recent report entitled, "The Riches of the Melting Pot: How Diversity in Metropolitan Areas Helps Grow Wages of Low- and High-wage Workers," they found that when international diversity increases, the average person's wages rise about 6 percent. It is even greater for low-wage earners.

I witnessed these benefits firsthand in Dayton, Ohio, where the Ahiska Turkish community recently emigrated in relatively large numbers. They are revitalizing the neighborhoods where they live, purchasing and fixing up formerly run-down homes, starting a community center and

small businesses, as well as getting involved in the community in order to directly contribute to strengthening the social fabric of their new home.

Given these facts, in this time of growing economic inequality in which the rich get richer while more people fall out of the middle class into the ranks of the working poor, it seems we should all be welcoming more immigrants into our towns.

Another common argument people make in favor of greatly curbing immigration, particularly of refugees, is that it will keep us safe from terrorists. Refugees already undergo very thorough, what some might consider "extreme," vetting, which takes almost two years in many cases, before being allowed into this country. And our current process of vetting refugees seems to be effective, particularly when you consider calculations by the CATO Institute that a U.S. citizen has a 1 in 3.64 billion (yes billion) chance of being killed in a terrorist attack initiated by a refugee. In fact, refugees, and illegal immigrants for that matter, are much more likely to be victims of violence than to initiate it.

In terms of protecting ourselves from foreign threats more generally, as a nation we spend about 54 percent of all available discretionary funds on the military. That means that we spend more than any country in the world to defend ourselves and our interests. To put it in context, that is almost three times the next highest spending country and more than the total spent by the seven next highest combined.

Given that we are by far the mightiest military power, we don't need to prove to the world that we are tough. Instead, what we need to prove is that we are just. Every time we fail to live up to the values upon which our country was founded — freedom, equal justice and providing help and hope to the most vulnerable in the world, we play into the hands of our true enemies. In the world's eyes we become the myopic, self-centered bullies that those who want to destroy us portray us to be. We are better than that. So let's engage with the world in ways that show it. If we do not, this failure will prove more destructive to our democracy than any terrorist attack.