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Commentary: The problem with Trump's immigration executive orders

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Recently, President Donald Trump signed several executive orders intended to follow through on his campaign promises to build a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border, deport millions of people and protect our national security. These executive orders call for boosting border patrol and immigration enforcement officers, stripping so-called sanctuary cities of federal grant funding, banning travel to the U.S. for citizens of seven countries, and placing limitations on refugees.

These plans are ineffective, xenophobic and, more importantly, an outright attack on immigrants and all of our values as Americans.

Let's start with the cost. Trump claims that his executive orders would save us billions of dollars, but the truth is the exact opposite — his plan would cost all U.S. taxpayers billions and the economy trillions. According to the Center for American Progress, under this plan we are looking at spending more than \$117 billion on the wall, including mandating detention and enforcement at the border. Additionally, according to Moody's, Trump's immigration policies would contribute to the loss of nearly 3.5 million jobs over the next four years. This plan is hiding the real cost of his immigration agenda and is going to be leaving you and me stuck to foot the bill.

Next, the notion that our country is under attack from people from Muslim nations or Syrian refugees resettling in the U.S. could not be farther from reality. According to the Cato Institute, foreigners from Iraq, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen (the countries where Trump has temporarily suspended the issuance of visas) have killed zero Americans in terrorist attacks on U.S. soil between 1975 and the end of 2015. The annual chance of an American dying in a terrorist attack committed by a refugee is one in 3.6 billion. This is due in large part to the fact that refugees, especially those from war-torn places like Syria, are already undergoing what Trump calls "extreme vetting." As an immigration attorney, I know firsthand that refugees coming to America are the most vetted of all those entering our country — going through intense screening via many national security agencies before they can enter the U.S.

Regardless of whether you think we are under attack from immigrants, our country has never had a policy in place to ban immigrants or refugees on the basis of religion, and as such this should gravely concern anyone who cares about the foundations of our democracy — fairness and equality. A ban on people from Muslim or Middle Eastern nations flies in the face of our values regarding religious and ethnic inclusion.

As for protecting individuals living in “sanctuary cities” throughout the U.S., there is little debate regarding the need to bring criminals to justice, whether they are citizens or not. But the idea that going after families that live in our communities and contribute to our economy will lower our country’s crime rate and help our country become safer is false. Pulling funding from and targeting hundreds of cities across the U.S. only serves to take away precious resources from law enforcement officers working to keep communities safe and make immigrants less interested in helping the police fight crime, for fear of deportation.

Trump’s ill-conceived executive orders will have virtually no effect on improving U.S. national security, are not practical and, more importantly, are inconsistent with our nation’s core values. The targets of the president’s executive orders are our neighbors, co-workers and colleagues. They are men, women and children fleeing danger and seeking a better life for themselves, just like our ancestors. Former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright tweeted last week: “There is no fine print on the Statue of Liberty. America must remain open to people of all faiths and backgrounds.” Trump’s policies demonstrate a severe lack of understanding of what is needed to improve our immigration system and will only make our country more polarized than ever.