



Our Take: Huizenga short-sighted in supporting Trump on wall

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In his letter in The Holland Sentinel dated Jan. 13 (“It’s time to secure our border”), U.S. Rep. Bill Huizenga made a number of misleading assertions and statements about immigrants, immigration and the humanitarian crisis at our southern border.

The letter propagates the same disingenuous claims that have been used over the past few years by the Trump administration to justify its illegitimate campaign against immigrants in the United States.

Specifically, Huizenga’s letter attempts to rationalize and justify the administration’s controversial position on border security, fleshing out proposed security measures, taking pains to avoid the hot-button phrase “border wall,” and citing statistics about drug trafficking flows into the United States.

While Huizenga has occasionally stood against inhumane administration positions in the past — see his column calling on the administration to end family separation on June 29, 2018 (“Family reunification should be priority for Congress” — this recent letter puts him squarely on the wrong side.

Recent U.S. history demonstrates the administration’s proposed policies are short-sighted, and will do little else except exacerbate an already tragic situation and bloat federal budgets. In addition, Huizenga equates immigrants with drug traffickers — a position consistently popular with this administration but demonstrably false.

First, drug interdiction policies do not work on their own. Militarizing Florida in the 1980s, for example, did nothing but push cocaine trafficking routes elsewhere along the southern border. As long as there is demand, suppliers will find a way — and this country has a seemingly insatiable demand for drugs. If this administration was serious about cutting off the supply of heroin, it might consider policies that support legitimate Mexican agriculture instead of demonizing our neighbor and bullying Mexico over trade deals.

Second, equating immigrants with criminals is politics at its most cynical, where the government creates a problem and then blames the victims.

Study after study has shown that the vast majority of immigrants in the United States — both documented and not — are more law-abiding than U.S. citizens. The conservative, nonpartisan

Cato Institute, for example, has overwhelmingly found that crime rates are much lower among immigrant communities than in native-born communities.

When Huizenga cited the apprehension of 266,000 undocumented immigrants with criminal records in the past two years, he failed to mention that many of them were lawfully seeking asylum at a port of entry. Others were simply apprehended for the civil (not criminal) offense of unlawful presence in the United States. Still others were guilty simply of minor crimes, such as driving with an expired driver's license. Suggesting that those 266,000 people had "criminal records" misleads readers to believe that Immigration and Customs Enforcement is rounding up sex traffickers, rapists, murderers and drug dealers. Instead, ICE has focused on apprehending the people it can most easily target: people who are living ordinary lives to the best of their ability but who lack immigration status.

And all of this is beside the fact that the number of unlawful border crossings is at an all-time low, contrary to assertions that our borders are overwhelmed by countless hordes.

Next, the humanitarian crisis that Huizenga cites is the direct result of this administration's blundering, thoughtless and cruel maneuvers along the border. These include the Zero Tolerance policy that promoted family separation as a tool to discourage further immigration; Jeff Sessions' erosion of years of asylum precedent; and the blatant disregard of decades of international and national asylum treaties and laws.

To suggest that deploying more Border Patrol agents will help those waiting to lawfully enter and apply for asylum is dubious, at best. Furthermore, the \$800 million that Huizenga claims will be spent on incarcerating immigrants could be saved if the immigration system itself was the target of legislative change.

We can appreciate Huizenga's difficult position. He finds himself in the same party as an administration that regularly abuses some of the most vulnerable among us for prime-time talking points, and Huizenga has undoubtedly been instructed to drum up support for the president during this increasingly unpopular and harmful showdown.

We are, however, disappointed to see that Huizenga has chosen to lend his support to the administration's negotiating strategy of extending the government shutdown and threatening the livelihood of federal employees in order to try and force Congress to implement the administration's anti-immigrant agenda.

By attempting to set the needs of these two groups against each other, this administration is engaging in purely cynical political brinkmanship. If Huizenga wishes to serve his country and his constituents well, he should reflect on the harm that the government shutdown and the toxic political environment it has created are causing to immigrants and federal employees. Treating their rights as political bargaining chips is a betrayal of America's fundamental values.

And let's not be misled by this administration's most recent attempt to negotiate yet again using its favored DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) and TPS (Temporary Protected Status) currency, offering three-year extensions for close to one million individuals with this status. This offer does not offer a path to citizenship for these long-time, valued members of our communities and, further,

President Trump is using as leverage a policy that he himself needlessly and callously took away. These attempts to negotiate are largely window-dressing and offer no lasting relief to the people it purports to help and no relief whatsoever to the millions upon millions both within and without this country's borders.

We implore Sentinel readers to look beyond this short-sighted, unhelpful, and, frankly, distracting attempt to "reform" immigration. Further, we implore you to encourage your representatives to pursue rational and humane policies rooted in fact and research and not the fiction that so often informs this administration's self-serving and racially charged agenda.