



General Assembly Candidate Spotlight: Illegal Immigration

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This week's question: Border state governors have made headlines by transporting undocumented immigrants to various “sanctuary cities” in the north. How should the growing crisis at the border be handled, and should the burden be shared across the nation?

Rob Davies (R), Running for State Senate, District 12

The crisis at the border is the direct result of the policies put in place by the current administration. The current system of catch-and-release, with an order to appear before a judge at some far distant time in the future, is designed to fail and serves to encourage people to enter illegally. The result is a mass human tragedy. People from around the world place their fate in the hands of a violent and vicious criminal organization to smuggle them across the border. Many of these people are women and children who are victims of sex trafficking and sexual assault. Many die in the process. The fentanyl smuggled across with the human cargo has killed hundreds of thousands in the United States.

The solution to the problem is straightforward. Start with completing the physical barriers to entry along the entire border. While this is not a complete solution, it will help make the problem more manageable. Those who succeed in crossing the border should be immediately returned to Mexico, far from the border. Those who are caught later should be deported. Strict enforcement will disincentivize people from entering illegally. The Remain-in-Mexico program was a reasonable system to ensure that asylum claims could be resolved according to the law.

Having spoken with people who live in border communities, I know that the situation along the border has overwhelmed the available resources there. The burden placed on these communities is unfair. Transporting illegal immigrants to “sanctuary cities” may be a political stunt, but it does serve to relieve some of the burden on the border and to demonstrate the problems caused by these disastrous policies to the people who support them. The real solution is for the U.S. Government to regain control of the southern border.

Jessica Florio (R), Running for State Senate, District 44

As you know, the border crisis is mostly a federal issue and stems from the failed policies of the Biden administration. However, as a state legislator, I would work with our congressional delegation from PA to ensure that any burdens don't fall on PA residents.

Ilya Breyman (D), Running for State House, District 178

As a first-generation immigrant, I find it sickening that both major political parties use refugees and asylum seekers as pawns in their political games. The practice of state governments luring vulnerable migrants onto one-way buses and planes out of town would be morally dubious even if these states could claim better reasons for doing it than helping Gov. DeSantis build a national profile for his future White House bid, and allowing Gov. Greg Abbott fend off a stronger-than-expected reelection challenger in Beto O'Rourke.

Let's be crystal clear here: these governors aren't trying to actually solve the very real problem that our broken immigration system has been for a long time. They are scoring political points. That is wrong, regardless of which team is doing it.

In Feb. 2017, the CATO Institute, a libertarian think tank (this being *Broad & Liberty*, after all), published its 8th edition of the “Cato Handbook for Policymakers.” In its chapter on Immigration, it unequivocally stated that “[t]he American immigration system is unsuited to the modern economy,” that there are “too few pathways to legal immigration,” and that “[t]hese problems put a drag on US economic growth and increase the scale and scope of illegal activity in black markets.” CATO goes on to propose a series of time-tested measures that would benefit the US economy and allow it to welcome more legal immigrants without endangering our security or adding costs to our welfare system. Their proposals were a fundamentally reasonable path forward on immigration.

Sadly, neither the Biden Administration, nor the Trump administration before them, seemed all that interested in those solutions, and neither political party seems willing to show the leadership that will be necessary to engage the American people in thinking about immigration differently. After all, it will take real leadership to undo the decades of failed immigration pitches that have us, the “nation of immigrants,” desensitized to the real human cost of the current system to the point where we show a pavlovian impulse to treat immigrants as a political issue first, and not as human beings.

We need a secure border, we need to expand legal immigration options, we need to streamline visa issuances and asylum adjudication, and we need work-based programs — for skilled, low-skilled, and extraordinary talent. All of these things we can do — we just need our leaders to actually lead.

It is important to note that, as I am running for the PA House of Representatives and not for U.S. Congress, most of these issues fall outside of the purview of that office. The state can do very little here without the federal government's express approval, but one small thing that the state legislature could do is to open a dialogue with federal policymakers in Congress over possible ways they could empower the 50 states to build state infrastructures to help address migration. An idea I think is worth taking a look at is getting states to agree to something akin to the Canadian Provincial Nominee Program, in which each state would be asked to assess its own need and capacity to accept and employ immigrants, and that determination would be used to inform the number of migrants granted status in that state. Combined with cutting red-tape for qualified immigrants with foreign credentials to get licenses in various fields, this local approach would be far more effective than relying on artificial quotas set by the out-of-touch politicians in Washington, and would ensure immigrants are settled in locales that are poised to benefit from them.