

Wible: The advantages of taking in the 'stranger'

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There are "strangers" in our midst. Are they a blessing or a curse? Let's examine that question.

We Alabamians have long enjoyed a reputation for our faith. For many of us, that Christian faith drives much of what we do, how we raise our children, treat our neighbors and who we elect as political leaders. An interesting aspect of faith is that its teachings actually make good sense.

Now, we note a new president taking the oath of office with his right hand raised to God and his left hand resting on two Bibles. With this new president in mind, as those Bibles tell us to do, we direct many of our prayers toward Washington, D.C., to the man with his hand resting on those Bibles and to the leaders in the Congress.

Of the many subjects addressed in those Bibles, we find a topic plucked from this week's headlines, news scrolls, and soundbites – immigration. Yes, immigration. In the Books of Matthew and Luke, Jesus commends to the faithful the "taking in" of the stranger. Further, the writer of Hebrews admonishes us that in taking in a stranger, we may take in "an angel unawares."

Since President Trump took office, immigration has been front and center on his agenda. Recent executive actions and orders call for a wall on our southern border, tighter controls on, and the deportation of the "strangers" in our midst. Further, in actions suspended by at least four United States District Courts, and the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, he directs the suspension of refugee admissions and the travel for anyone from seven Muslim-majority countries. "Strangers all."

Without question, we must secure our borders, admit only individuals who pose no threat to our country, and deport violent criminals. But overbroad, enforcement-only approaches do not address the urgent need for a better immigration process. In fact, these approaches are counter-productive.

One necessity is to create a legal way forward for young undocumented immigrants who came to the U.S. as children, known as Dreamers. An Obama administration measure called Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) allowed them to stay in the country temporarily and to work or attend school as long as they do not create a criminal record.

This group of immigrants came to this country, not of their own will. Many of them know only the United States as home. We should not punish them for working hard and for building a life of which they, and all of us can be proud.

Rather, we *need* the young immigrants who are contributing in ways that help all Americans. They are the next and in some cases, the current generation of workers and job creators for America.

A January report from the Cato Institute highlights the extreme costs of turning our backs on these young people. Researchers found that such an effort would cost more than \$60 billion up front with hundreds of billions more in economic losses over the following decade. Further, we add that harsh laws that drive immigrants into the shadows pose grave consequences for public safety and public health that hurt all of us.

The far more economically viable approach is to offer a legal mechanism to account for all immigrants who lack authorization. After an accounting, appropriate officers can identify and deport those who actually pose a threat. We should allow others legally to remain.

As was true during the Obama and every other administration — effective, long-term policies are the responsibility of Congress, not the president. Republicans now have control of all three branches of the federal government. That means they will get the credit — or blame— for our immigration policies for at least the next two years. Republicans, working with their fellow Congress members and Senators should start by finding a legal way forward for Dreamers.

As our elected officials from Alabama consider any immigration reform measures, I urge them to put the teachings of the Bible first, to think of the sanctity of the family, to show compassion for their fellow man, and to heed Jesus' call to welcome the stranger.

Alabama is our sweet home – a majestic and compassionate state. Her citizens daily show this compassion and an uncommon decency. Her cities regularly attract headlines for charitable giving. We should continue to stand tall as an example for the rest of the country, as a leader of faith and family. To this end, we must encourage our leaders in Washington to adhere to these values, on immigration and on all other issues that they face.