



Column: Changing the terms of the immigration debate

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There is no border crisis. There is a human crisis on our border, and the distinction is important. Immigration is good. Immigrants are great, and the United States needs more of both. Immigrants have always been a source of power and greatness for the American people. What they add to our culture, our politics, our heritage, our language, our economy is immeasurable. Thanks to immigration, the United States went from a loose confederation of settler colonies strongly rooted in English culture to a unified people who comprise every race, ethnicity, religion — every make and model of humanity — in our great family of freedom.

To the extent there is a human crisis involving the immigration system, it is entirely manmade and the fault lies at the feet of policymakers who seek to keep immigrants from coming here legally and adding to our collective greatness. Rather than being welcomed, these would-be Americans — huddled masses yearning to breathe free — are utterly abused by a deliberately cruel and bigoted bureaucracy. The way our legal system treats new arrivals is despicable, the way certain politicians choose to talk about them is insane, and the terms of immigration debate are often asinine.

The evidence suggests that humans have been migrating and moving around on the planet for as long as we've had thumbs. I have to imagine the main reason people keep moving around is to find a better life and provide for their family and loved ones. Any worthwhile Mom or Dad would do anything to keep their children fed and safe. Even in a world divided into many nationalities and notions of justice, most people innately understand that caring for one's child is a moral good that outweighs most other considerations. If there is a way to provide for their children legally, most parents would choose the legal path. If there is no legal way to do so, however, those same parents — myself included — would not hesitate in the least to break whatever law they needed to fill their child's empty stomach.

I have a hard time passing moral judgment on someone who breaks immigration laws in a desperate attempt to provide for their kids. Coming here or at least wanting to do so seems wholly understandable. And, before you ask, "Why don't illegal immigrants come in legally?" you need to understand that most would, but they can't. Federal law prevents them from doing so.

Someone looking to immigrate to the United States permanently will have to apply for some kind of work authorization or "green card." However, U.S. law limits the number of green cards

that can be issued based on per-country immigration caps and limits on certain categories of green card. The Cato Institute, a conservative thinktank, illustrated the issue this way in their 2019 immigration policy review, “Because Congress limited the number of green cards for certain types of immigrants, not everyone who receives an approval (to be a permanent resident) can apply for a green card immediately. Like customers at a deli, they wait for their number to be called.”

The wait for an available green card slot can be years. According to the Cato Institute, in 2018 only 2% of those approved for legal residency were allowed to apply for a green card with no wait — meaning some 98% of people who met the criteria for immigration had to wait for an available green card slot. According to the Migration Policy Institute, a non-partisan research institute, as of March 2023, the longest wait was 25 years as the U.S. State Department was still processing some visa applications dated to November 1997. Imagine having to wait decades to get your child into the United States to give them a better life. These waiting periods make legal immigration all but impossible for many would-be legal immigrants.

Given the options, is it any wonder that so many people try to come here as asylum seekers or come here illegally? Who wouldn't! In the absence of a more rational and easy system of legal immigration, desperate people will continue to make desperate choices and try to cross into the United States. If you want to make the situation better at the border, you just need to let more people enter legally and in an orderly fashion. But, such commonsense solutions appear utterly lost on our political leaders.

The Republican response to this human crisis has been to challenge immigrants to a sadistic game of chicken. Rather than making it easier for people to come into this country legally, they want to build a wall to keep people out. Governor Abbott of Texas is laying razor wire on the border, a move that, aside from being unconstitutional, has resulted in the deaths of at least two children already (Yorlie Rubi, age 10, and Jonathan Agustin, age 8). Last year, Gov. Ron DeSantis of Florida endorsed using “deadly force” against migrants. Donald Trump, front-runner for the GOP presidential nomination, said illegal immigrants are “poisoning the blood” of America — language unsettlingly similar to language used by Adolph Hitler against Jewish folks in Nazi Germany — and plans on sweeping immigration raids and confining certain immigrants to detention camps if re-elected.

Aside from the moral degeneracy displayed by GOP leaders, what is truly baffling is that these horrific measures would not solve the problem in the law that is driving people to the border in the first place. If you have a problem with illegal immigration, then we should change the law to let more people in legally. If you prevent people from coming here the “right way”, you are going to have more and more people coming any way they can manage.

I was born with a winning lottery ticket in my hand — I was born a citizen of the United States of America. If I wasn't born here, I'd do anything to get here — especially if I had a family to take care of. For me, America represents an ideal and a hope that, no matter your religion or your language or where you were from, there is a place on this earth where the equality of all people demands recognized and a person's merit was worth far more than their parentage. So, I see the

current wave of anti-immigrant hysteria as a shocking and detestable betrayal of all that America stands for. Immigrants and immigration are unmitigated positives for the U.S. and it is long past time we change the terms of the immigration debate.

The problem is not the immigration, it's how the immigration system treats people who want to come here legally and the impossible position that system puts poor and working folk in. We need more immigrants, not fewer. We need to release more green cards and work permits. We need to make it faster to gain entry for those who want to come here and work. Most of all, we need to change the terms of the current immigration debate: It ain't about keeping folks out — its' about getting everybody in legally.