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Op-Ed: Migration, Immigration, and Climate Change

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Politicians are attacking immigrants so it must be election time! Stoking fear of the “other” was a winning strategy when our forebears lived in trees. Just be afraid and scamper to the toughest-talking ape for protection.

As of this writing, Governor DeSantis is shipping immigrants north like Harry & David gift packages. Certainly, the prank will please the ever-angry political base, and while the ethics and legality are suspect, it did get us talking about immigration.

Immigration is migration, or “fleeing a bad place for a better one.” Our ancestors did it. Other animals and even plants do it. Politicians instill fear stressing two factors especially: migrants threaten our wealth and our safety. They take from real Americans who pay taxes, and they are often criminals and terrorists.

Except none of that is true. From the Cato Institute: “Immigrants, including illegal immigrants, are less likely to be incarcerated in prisons, convicted of crimes, or arrested than [Euro]Americans.”

And our economy needs immigrants to fill jobs left by retiring Boomers. Mark Zandi, chief economist at Moody’s Analytics, says about increased immigration, “it would alleviate labor shortages and cool inflation and interest rates.” Their research indicates a 1.15% increase in GDP for every 1% increase in the population made of immigrants.

To hear it told, immigrants are a drag on real American taxpayers...

So, as the chest-thumping apes seek to create immigration hysteria going into the mid-term elections, we can respond with the facts and share them with others. (Find many more immigration myths debunked at carnegie.org).

Don't panic. It's going to get much worse.

But in 30, 50, or 100 years, look out. Large swaths of our home planet are going to become much less livable while the human population blooms out to 11 billion individuals. Migration pressures could increase exponentially, with countless millions fleeing famine, flood, and the inevitable wars.

It is a formula for tremendous social upheaval, which is toxic to democracy. Already, the out-migration from a climate-change-driven war in Syria threatens Europe's post-WWII status quo. Even as survivors of the Holocaust are aging off the stage, fascism is again slithering under the door.

So is immigration good or bad? In the short-term, it's a net plus for our country. Over a longer term, mass movements of desperate people and the efforts to accommodate or to exclude them may become wildly disruptive to society.

Somebody Do Something!

Fortunately there are solutions...here are two: stop climate change and stop having so many babies.

The first is hard but doable if we behave as if the future of humanity depends on it.

Meanwhile, more education for girls and women, worldwide, is likely the most effective form of birth control and would bring other amazing benefits for humanity as well.

Shorter term? Simple. Let's resist the manipulation. Let's vote in smart problem-solving apes instead of chest-thumpers. It is fortune more than merit that decides which side of the fence we each find ourselves, so a little humility is a good idea.

Fortunes can change.