



Star opinion: 'Sessions' Choice' forces parents to risk their kids' lives

May 12, 2018

The Trump administration continues its unvarnished attempts to make life difficult for immigrants.

Period.

Normally there would be a qualifier. After all, it is the immigrant in the country illegally who has been the traditional target. It is the “illegal” who “jumps the line” and doesn’t do things “the right way” that has caused so much consternation for many on the political right — at least in polite company.

But those days are gone. Under President Trump, anti-immigrant feelings have been given free rein in the halls of power, with punitive policies that in their cruelty and callousness damage not only the body politic but also the national soul.

The latest came Monday, when Attorney General Jeff Sessions announced, through speeches in Scottsdale and San Diego, that the Department of Homeland Security would refer 100 percent of unauthorized border crossers for prosecution. This includes families, which means children would be separated from their parents and sent to shelters operated by the Office of Refugee Resettlement. Once separated, the kids face deportation just the same, only now they do so on their own.

Most families that are reaching the border today come from Central America. Many are fleeing rampant violence and looking for asylum. It is against international law to prosecute asylum seekers, so the intent of the announcement must be interpreted as a way to sow fear among parents and deter them from coming – to force them to decide between risking their children’s lives by staying home or being separated from them in a strange land. Call it “Sessions’ Choice.”

The new policy is also impractical. Unless the government can increase the number of federal judges, many districts are already doing as much as they can do. As reported in the Star, district courts in Arizona are already operating at capacity, with most of that work coming from immigration cases.

It also comes at a time when apprehensions are at their lowest point since the early ’70s, making the attorney general’s claims of massive increases and an overwhelmed border ring false.

But it’s never been about the truth. One only need look at the administration’s handling of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, which the president eliminated last year, plunging almost 700,000 young immigrants brought into the country illegally as children into legal limbo.

Deporting DACA recipients — who by the program's requirements must be law-abiding, in school or a high school graduate, or serve in the military — would cost the federal government \$60 billion, along with a \$280 billion loss in economic growth over the next 10 years, according to a Cato Institute report.

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While Trump claimed the program was illegally created by President Obama and that Congress should have the final say, a legislative solution died when his administration made it clear that anything short of limiting *legal* immigration would not be supported by the president.

Earlier this month, the Department of Homeland Security terminated Temporary Protected Status for 57,000 Hondurans who had been in the U.S. since 1999. They now have 20 months to leave the country they've called home for almost 20 years. They join the 195,000 Salvadorans, 46,000 Haitians, and thousands more from Nicaragua, Sudan and Nepal that have also seen their TPS status eliminated since 2017.

While the program was always meant to be temporary, providing relief for citizens of countries who had experienced a natural disaster or civil unrest, in practice it has been extended because in many cases conditions have not improved — sometimes they're worse than when the immigrants came here in the first place.

These immigrants have made their lives here *legally*, paid taxes, started businesses, bought homes and are the parents of more than 270,000 U.S. citizens. How does it make practical sense to deport them now?

Other plans by the administration include rescinding the Obama-era rule that allowed spouses of H1-B visa holders to be employed legally in the U.S., which could leave more than 70,000 people, most of them skilled professionals from India, sitting at home.

Another proposal would reclassify immigrants as “charges,” limiting their chance of getting permanent legal residency and even potentially subjecting them to deportation, if they claim any benefit for which they currently qualify — including those for their U.S.-born children or U.S.-citizen spouses, such as Medicaid or other health and nutrition programs.

None of these actions make America any safer. They hurt us economically, upend families and lower our moral standing in the world. And the rationale behind them is patently false.

Unemployment can't be at its lowest in years while at the same time immigrants take our jobs; apprehensions can't be the lowest in decades and yet immigrants are swarming our borders. The rule of law is sacrosanct, yet it is clear our president cares not a whit for our norms and institutions.

In attacking “the other,” we slowly chip away at ourselves. We must stop before we have nothing left.