



## Chain migration is the American Dream

Miles Trinidad

February 18, 2018

Apparently, my family and I are part of the immigration problem.

Since Donald Trump was elected, he and the Republican Party have embarked on a crusade against immigration: he derided Mexicans as drug dealers and rapists, implemented a travel ban targeting Muslims and betrayed America's promise to Dreamers. However, it is his current attack on family-based immigration – or what he and immigration opponents call “chain migration” – that feels like a slap in the face to my family.

“Under the current broken system, a single immigrant can bring in virtually unlimited numbers of distant relatives,” Trump said in his first State of the Union Address. “This vital reform is necessary, not just for our economy, but for our security, and our future.”

I never considered my grandmother as a national security threat.

My grandmother grew up as the second-oldest child of eight in a small, poor and rural village in the Philippines. My grandmother's family was better off than the typical family in her village. Her family was the only one in the town able to afford a car and a TV, with every kid in town cramming into the living room to watch. Some would even peek through the windows if there wasn't enough room in the house just so they could catch a glimpse of it.

She loved her home, but she dreamed of achieving more.

In the late 1960s, she finished nursing school and left her family behind to immigrate to the United States with my grandfather. Shortly after arriving, they enlisted in the military and deployed to Vietnam. My grandmother served as a nurse, and my grandfather served in the Navy. After the war, they settled down and started the typical nuclear family in a single-family home in the suburbs of Los Angeles.

As my grandmother planted her roots in her new home, she would later provide a launching pad of opportunity for her siblings: living wages, adequate healthcare, education and opportunity – the American Dream.

In the ensuing decades, my grandmother sponsored her siblings one by one to come to America through the family reunification process. As each sibling came and left her home, they became nurses, x-ray technicians and engineers. Their success helped their children succeed. Some

followed the footsteps of their parents. Others became a psychiatrist, social workers or small business owners. Some would eventually serve in the Marines and the Army in both Iraq and Afghanistan. Two generations later, it's time for my cousins and I to pursue our own dreams.

My entire family and I owe every opportunity we ever had to my grandmother.

My family's immigration story is not unique compared to the million of stories around the country, but these million of stories make the United States unique. We don't just want the American Dream for ourselves, we want it for each other.

Trump's case to drastically reduce legal family immigration is either intentionally misleading or ill-informed, and it flies in the face of the principles of our country.

The family-based immigration process doesn't allow for "virtually unlimited numbers of distant relatives," as Trump argues. According to guidelines from the U.S. State Department, only 226,000 people enter the country on family-based application visas per year. This is limited to U.S. residents' children, spouses, siblings and parents. Not grandma or grandpa, nor aunts or uncles, nor cousins or in-laws. This quota has created a backlog of applicants who must wait years or even decades for their green cards.

Trump's economic and security concerns over chain migration are also out of touch from reality.

Immigrants contribute to the economy rather than drain it. According to a report by the National Academy of Sciences, immigration contributes to labor growth, promotes entrepreneurship and leads to innovation and technological advancements that keeps America competitive.

In terms of national security, research from the Cato Institute found that immigrants are less likely to commit crimes, and the Government Accountability Office found that homegrown right-wing extremists, not foreign-born immigrants, have committed more acts of domestic terrorism since 2001.

We cannot allow politicians to play loose with facts to pit Americans against each other. My family's story is the American Dream. When we deny the American Dream to other Americans, especially on false pretenses, we lose what makes us American – and chain migration is the American Dream.