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When it comes to immigration, do facts really matter?

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“Everyone is entitled to his own opinion, but not to his own facts.”

That quip from Daniel Patrick Moynihan, the longtime U.S. Senator from New York, was long accepted as truth. You could twist and spin the story all you wanted, but at the end of the day, facts remained facts, and everyone knew it.

But, since 2016, America has drifted into a bizarre realm that rivals any rabbit hole Alice ever fell down for its sheer topsy-turvy nature. Facts no longer are facts, truth no longer is truth, and half the country doesn't seem to realize it, or care.

In no realm of our public governance has this been more the case than in immigration policy, where half-truths and outright lies continue to stoke the fears of Trump's base to masterful effect.

Since hitting the campaign trail, the president has vilified immigrants as “animals” and an “infestation.” As recently as Dec. 11 the president cast immigration as a crisis that “brings large scale crime and disease.”

If you believe the president and his chief fear-monger, Kirstjen Nielsen, our nation is under invasion by hordes of brown-skinned criminals bent on raping your daughters, killing your sons and robbing our nation of its riches. This is all wonderful political stagecraft for ginning up support born of fear and its ugly stepsister, nationalism. But, the problem with this narrative, other than its not-so-subtle racism, is it has absolutely no basis in fact.

As for us being overrun by immigrants, that bastion of liberal ne'er-do-wells, the George W. Bush Presidential Center, confirms immigrants account for only 13.5 percent of the population, which is “in line with historical norms.” Those immigrants account for half the growth in the U.S. labor force over the last decade — a key factor in our GDP growth — are more likely than native-born ‘Mericans to start small businesses and achieve college degrees, and have founded more than 40 percent of our country's Fortune 500 companies. The horrors.

But what of the cost? Surely these undocumented immigrants are bleeding our country dry. Just Wednesday Trump reassured anyone with an innate fear of “the others” and little taste for fact-checking: “I've heard numbers as high as \$275 billion we lose on illegal immigration.” The president offered absolutely no basis for that number because, well, there is none.

The facts point in quite the opposite direction. According to IRS data from 2015, undocumented immigrants pay upwards of \$23.6 billion a year in income taxes for federal services they mostly can't access — a huge net gain that helps offset native-born citizens who take out far more than they put in. In 2013 alone, undocumented immigrants paid \$13 billion into Social Security —

again, money they'll never be able to draw back out. And, according to the Institute on Taxation & Economic Policy, they pay in another \$11.6 billion a year in state and local taxes.

The money we're losing on immigration policy is due to our refusal to fully integrate immigrants into the economy. A 2018 study by City University of New York concluded we're losing \$15.2 billion a year by not streamlining citizenship for Dreamers alone.

Oh, but the crime! The scary brown people are coming with all that crime. We know, because the president says so. Repeatedly. But, what of those pesky facts?

The CATO Institute — just slightly more conservative than Reagan's ghost — found in a 2018 study that “immigrants do not increase local crime rates and are less likely to cause crime than their native-born peers.”

The incarceration rate was 1.53 percent for natives, 0.85 percent for illegal immigrants, and 0.47 percent for legal immigrants, according to the CATO study. For those keeping fact-based score, that means native-born Americans are 80 percent more likely to commit crimes than undocumented immigrants, and are more than three times as likely to be criminals as legal immigrants.

Between 1990 and 2014, the states with the greatest influx of immigrants — documented and otherwise — saw the largest reductions in crime, according to CATO.

Even this cursory review of facts reveals what sensible Americans across the political spectrum have known for generations: Immigrants make this country stronger, safer, more prosperous and far more vibrant than the bunker mentality nationalism of Trump and his sycophants.

If we cared about making America great, we would listen to facts. And the facts tell us we need to streamline and increase legal immigration and fully integrate those already here, rather than waste our time and money on a gigantic monument to the efficacy of ladders.

This should matter, if you care about facts more than racially charged conjecture and impassioned, anecdotal episodes of pithy propaganda.

But, then again, this is post-2016 America. And what do facts really matter on this side of the rabbit hole?

I suppose we each must answer that for ourselves, and pray our collective reasoning is equal to the task of saving what remains of our republic.