



Don't Ration the American Dream

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We are now just 24 hours away from voters in New Jersey and Virginia heading to the polls to pick their next Governor and there's a Willie Horton flashback with a Trump twist in play in both states. Lieutenant Governor Kim Guadagno and Ed Gillespie used their final push to link their Democratic opponents to MS-13, the violent El Salvadorian drug gang. The GOP line of attack links both Phil Murphy and Lt. Gov. Ralph Northam's support for so called 'sanctuary cities' as the equivalent of endorsing the harboring of violent illegal aliens.

It's should now be clear, based on the tenor of these two bellwether races that, despite all the handwringing by MSNBC's pet Republicans, President Trump's nativist and anti-immigrant fear mongering has executed a flawless takeover of the Republican Party's soul. What else can you do when your 'we'll lower your taxes' message is just not getting the job done?

In off year elections, when turnout is likely to be soft, its key to activate the most angry and fearful in your base. So, the Guadagno campaign, running double digits behind, had no other play to make other than to run those ads linking Phil Murphy to Jose Carranza, whose 2007 brutal murder of three New Jersey students in Newark outraged the entire state.

It does not matter to the GOP fear mongering machine that in urban places like Newark, Paterson and Camden, where a high percentage of New Jersey's 500,000 undocumented residents live, overall crime is actually down. It is precisely this influx of immigrants that is helping to stabilize neighborhoods as well as staunch a steady state population decline that has seen our Congressional delegation shrink from 15 to 12 over the last 30 years.

Across the Hudson what's been happening in New York, a sanctuary city with also at least a half a million undocumented residents, indicates their presence has come with an unprecedented decline in violent crime and a related explosion in property values. Donald Trump has experienced that first-hand in the value of his New York real estate portfolio. It's hard to do justice to the decline in violent crime in New York. It has come over the arc of my career as a journalist, largely as a result of community policing that engages neighborhoods. In 1990, 2,262 murders were reported in the city. Last year there were 330.

What New York City and other so called sanctuary communities have learned is that by reducing the fear factor in immigrant neighborhoods law enforcement gets a much higher rate of cooperation in ferreting out the violent criminals who most usually prey on their own communities.

The linkage between undocumented immigrants and a propensity for criminal behavior has been widely debunked and yet Trump rode that hobby horse all the way to the Oval Office. In a 2015

report from the National Academy of Sciences researchers concluded that “immigrants are in fact much less likely to commit crime than natives, and the presence of large numbers of immigrants seems to lower crime rates.....This disparity also holds for young men most likely to be undocumented immigrants: Mexican, Salvadoran, and Guatemalan men.”

The report continued. “Today, the belief that immigrants are more likely to commit crimes is perpetuated by ‘issue entrepreneurs’ who promote the immigrant-crime connection in order to drive restrictionist immigration policy.”

The Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank, reached similar findings in a report earlier this year. “Empirical studies of immigrant criminality generally find that immigrants do not increase local crime rates and are less likely to cause crime than their native-born peers, and that natives are more likely to be incarcerated than immigrants,” Cato researchers concluded.

In 2015 the American Immigration Council issued a report entitled “The Criminalization of Immigration in the United States”. The AIC researchers found that between 1990 and 2013, the foreign-born share of the U.S. population increased from 7.9 percent to 13.1 percent, and the number of unauthorized immigrants went up from 3.5 million to 11.2 million but at the same time, the violent crime rate (murder, rape and aggravated assault) decreased 48 percent and property crime rate fell 41 percent according to FBI data.

Thousands of undocumented immigrants have enlisted in the United States military at a time when experts say the country is not generating a sufficient number of young Americans eligible for enlistment to meet recruiting targets. According to a 2015 report commissioned by Mission:Readiness, a nonprofit, nonpartisan national security organization made up of 500 retired generals and admirals, 75 percent of the nation’s young adults are unqualified for military enlistment. The study concludes that three top reasons why our young American adults don’t make the grade are that they have been poorly educated, already have disqualifying criminal records, are physically unfit or have other health issues. A quarter of young Americans of recruiting age lack a high school diploma and most of the dropouts who went on to get their GED “do not possess sufficient math or reading skills to qualify,” according to the Mission:Readiness report.

Here in New Jersey, undocumented immigrants paid close to \$600 million in state and local taxes according to the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy. In 2013, analysts at the Social Security Administration calculated that in 2010 undocumented immigrants had paid \$13 billion into the system and were making on average \$34,000 a year at the time. From 1996 to 2003, undocumented workers paid a combined \$90 billion into both Social Security and Medicare. Across the country close to 1 in 3 undocumented households own their own home and pay \$3.6 billion in property taxes.

The purpose of a sanctuary city designation is to keep the families of Americans intact. Between 2010 and 2014 one in eleven children in New Jersey was a US citizen who was also living with at least one undocumented family member. At least half a million US citizens here in New Jersey are living with at least one family member who is undocumented. Over 60 percent of the undocumented have lived here for over a decade or longer.

Often their reasons for migrating were tied to destructive US free trade policies that gave American farmers the edge on commodities for export like corn, that the migrants once made a

living back home raising. Others are here to escape the violence of the drug cartels that feed America's insatiable addictions. These folks are not 'criminal aliens'. They are our relatives, neighbors, and our children's classmates.