

Missoulian

Trump's scapegoating of immigrants is dangerous, inaccurate

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Most Americans react with surprise when they learn a majority of undocumented immigrants crossing the U.S.-Mexico border in recent years are heading south. From 2009 to 2014, 1 million immigrants returned to Mexico while 870,000 arrived in the U.S., according to analysis of the latest government data by Pew Research Center.

Of course, President Trump hasn't let that alter his message. At his August rally in Phoenix, he declared, "Years of uncontrolled immigration have placed enormous pressure on the jobs and wages of working families... It's unfair to working people of all backgrounds."

But Trump has it backward. In fact, working people benefit from the jobs and economic opportunities immigrants provide.

The Harvard Business Review found immigrants represent just 15 percent of the U.S. population, but they create about 25 percent of new businesses. And these aren't just bodegas and family businesses. The Kauffman Foundation reports "more than 40 percent of the Fortune 500 companies in 2010 were founded by an immigrant or the child of an immigrant."

In addition to contributing positively to our national economy, immigrants play a crucial role in stabilizing and revitalizing struggling communities. For decades, rural areas and post-industrial cities have grappled with debilitating out-migration. Many of the communities effectively weathering these upheavals have an influx of immigrants to thank.

Immigrants are pumping new life into communities like Akron, Ohio, and Storm Lake, Iowa, which, unlike nearby towns, recovered from successive economic shocks by embracing immigrants who fill essential jobs, buy homes and do the thing elemental to a thriving economy: start businesses and create jobs.

Job creation depends largely on new business formation, and immigrant-founded businesses create new jobs that generate \$20 billion annually in local and federal taxes. Embracing and welcoming these individuals isn't just the humane thing to do. It's also smart economic development strategy.

Trump and other immigration hawks have proposed a new merit-based system that would invite only the "best and brightest" to America. Humanitarian concerns aside, reducing the number of immigrants with low skills and education may seem like smart economic policy. Again, the data disagree. Immigrants with fewer skills and less education actually create new businesses at a higher rate. Counterintuitive, sure, but some observers suggest the characteristics this population embodies — namely risk-tolerance, perseverance and problem-solving skills — ideally suit them for entrepreneurship.

Even immigrants who don't start businesses have, at worst, a neutral effect on earnings. An analysis by the libertarian Cato Institute found immigration had no significant impact on the wages of American workers. And, although poor immigrants may tap into social services initially, Cato found they use public benefits at a lower rate than poor native-born citizens over the long term.

Furthermore, the idea that immigrants — particularly refugees — lead to more crime is a myth.

FBI data for U.S. cities resettling the most refugees per capita indicate both violent and property crime rates fell in 9 of 10 cities — dramatically in some cases. In West Springfield, Massachusetts, the one city where crime increased, an epidemic of opioids — produced by pharmaceutical corporations, not Mexican cartels — was the driving force.

So if Trump truly is concerned about jobs, wages and working families, he would be wise to recognize the contribution that immigrants make to the U.S. economy and its communities.

Scapegoating immigrants fuels resentment and hate, not the economic prosperity he promised.