



Trump declares war on Emma Lazarus

August 16, 2019

Donald Trump has decided that the lamp beside the golden door must be extinguished for the tired, the poor, and the huddled masses. Let the wretched refuse build their lives in Canada, he figures.

Going forward, we shall welcome only the pale and well-insured, and if they can afford a stay at Mar-a-Lago, that would be viewed favorably.

It is no longer enough for this administration to demonize undocumented immigrants. Starting Oct. 15, Trump's Department of Homeland Security will enact rules that will essentially purge legal immigrants, including those with American children who are leading productive lives here.

The "public charge" rule stipulates that if legal migrants need non-cash benefits such as Medicaid, food stamps, or housing vouchers — or are "likely" to need such assistance for more than a year — they would be ineligible for permanent status.

Some regard the bootstraps mandate as practical. Membership in any club should be merit-based, and if someone is going to be a burden, they typically aren't welcome. And the administration says it's just implementing a rule passed in 1996.

But that rule never included non-cash benefits such as Medicaid and SNAP, and this is just the latest expression of Trump's contempt for human consequences, his cynical impulse to send legal immigrants back to their S-hole countries before they become voters, and, yes, his pursuit of racial purity, as this will favor European-based, wealthier émigrés, such as "people from places like Norway."

In effect, he is advancing the bogus premise that immigrants are freeloaders and connecting people of color to welfare. Actually, the libertarian Cato Institute found last year that "immigrants are less likely to consume welfare benefits and, when they do, they consume a lower dollar value of benefits than native-born Americans."

But that won't register with a president who recently suppressed a report which found that refugees brought in \$63 billion more in revenue over the past decade than they cost.

In Trump's world, their fate will now rest with a DHS bureaucrat who weighs "the totality of the alien's circumstances," with greater emphasis on that individual's financial security. The rule itself notes that this assessment is "inherently subjective and discretionary in nature." No kidding.

This puts price tags on human lives. For example, if one earns more than 250 percent of the federal poverty line (\$30,300 for an individual, \$53,000 for a family of 3) and has private insurance not subsidized by the ACA, those would be “heavily weighted positive” factors.

But as the Wall Street Journal pointed out, the U.S. already has four million foreign-born, legal workers earning less than \$27,820 per year, doing jobs that nobody else will do. What becomes of these people, who may need some public assistance to get by?

More than likely, if they encounter a rough patch along their path to the American dream, they’d have to choose between feeding their kids or keeping their green card.

“It virtually shuts the pathway to a permanent, secure future to anyone who is not white and wealthy,” said Marielena Hincapié of the Immigration Law Center, which expects the rule to affect 26 million people, either directly or indirectly.

More specifically, the Kaiser Foundation says the rule will lead to a decline in Medicaid and CHIP participation, with a chilling effect on the health of American-born children living in immigrant households. Erika Nava of New Jersey Policy Perspective, who calls the rule “piñata politics,” estimates the health of 700,000 New Jersey families will be jeopardized by the rule.

Accordingly, our state has joined 12 others in a lawsuit challenging the rule, as Attorney General Gurbir Grewal believes Trump’s efforts to restrict migration to the well-off “are as unlawful as they are inhumane.”

It is also un-American, an assault on our values from a president who thinks it’s good policy to declare war on Emma Lazarus. He was informed in 2018 that rules must never be forged by bigotry, and he must be reminded again.