



Guest Editorial: Don't buy into immigration scare tactics

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Republican politicians from the White House to the Florida House of Representatives are using scare tactics about immigrants to win support for extreme policies.

Donald Trump kicked off his successful presidential campaign with rhetoric about immigrants, portraying them as drug dealers and rapists. More recently he has used individual criminal cases involving immigrants who lack legal status to argue that illegal immigration, and some forms of legal immigration, pose a major danger to the country.

Now Florida House Speaker Richard Corcoran is trying to use the Trump playbook to propel his expected campaign for governor. In recent weeks, his political action committee has run a commercial on Fox News and other stations featuring a young, red-headed woman walking through a suburban neighborhood before an “illegal immigrant” guns her down.

“This could have happened to any family, anywhere,” Corcoran says in the ad. “Incredibly, some Tallahassee politicians want to make Florida a sanctuary state.”

The claim about “Tallahassee politicians” is inaccurate, with PolitiFact charitably rating it “Half True” in a recent fact check. Florida doesn't have any sanctuary cities, where officials are prohibited from enforcing immigration laws, just officials like Alachua County Sheriff Sadie Darnell who have resisted the federal government's illegal demands to act as its deportation force.

An even bigger lie is the idea that immigrants are major contributors to crime in our country.

A March 2017 study by the libertarian Cato Institute found that “illegal immigrants are 44 percent less likely to be incarcerated than natives” and legal immigrants are 69 percent less likely. Numerous other studies have also found that immigrants commit fewer crimes than native-born citizens, including a 2015 National Academy of Sciences study that found that the presence of large numbers of immigrants correlates with lower crime rates.

Of course, research doesn't incite the emotions of voters like individual stories about immigrants committing crimes. These scare tactics give cover to harsh immigration policies that would separate massive numbers of immigrants from their children and devastate communities where they have long been contributing members.

The Trump administration has already taken steps to deport hundreds of thousands of immigrants from Haiti, El Salvador and other countries who have lived in the U.S. for years and in some cases decades. Now it is trying to hold hostage the future of young immigrants brought to the U.S. illegally as children, known as Dreamers, in order to advance policies severely restricting family-based immigration and largely limiting immigration to individuals with certain skills.

Other demands, such as increased funding for border security measures, are more reasonable and should be considered in pursuit of a bipartisan deal on the Dreamers. But reaching such a deal is more difficult when the president and others use a broad brush in painting immigrants as being criminals.

Don't let them get away with lying about immigrants in order to scare people into supporting extreme changes to immigration law.