



Letter: Immigration Reform Should Not Be Driven by Racist Ideas

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As the grandson of immigrants, I believe the time is now for comprehensive immigration reform. After seeing the Inspector General's report regarding conditions at detention centers along the southern border, learning of the deaths of eight migrant children in U.S. custody, seeing the tragic image of a father who drowned holding his small daughter in his arms, and hearing about the fear in our local immigrant communities that their families may be torn apart by an ICE raid, it has become clear to us as a nation that the policies we are pursuing are simply not working.

Immigration is not just a part of our history, we are in fact, as John F. Kennedy said, "a nation of immigrants." One critically important detail that is not often mentioned in any discussion of immigration, or immigration law, is that changes in the 1920s to make the laws (and quotas) more restrictive were driven by racist ideas with the intention of keeping Mexicans and Asians, as well as certain (Southern and Eastern) Europeans, out of the country (Italians and Jews). These laws were influenced by U.S. nativist and white supremacist groups like the Ku Klux Klan, who believed America should be a nation of white Anglo-Saxon Protestants and gave enormous preference to people from northern and western Europe over those from the southern and eastern parts of the continent, while still banning almost all immigration from Asia. Nativists also wanted to restrict Mexican immigration.

Illegal immigration began once those laws passed with many people from the restricted groups crossing the southern border in between official checkpoints. It can't be stated more clearly, and the parallels are striking, the origins of illegal immigration are as clearly driven by nativist, white supremacist and racist ideas as the immigration policies pursued by the Trump administration today... and they go back almost 100 years. It is critically important to bring this into the light because the immigration "debate" should not be framed by these ideas, rather, it should clear-eyed, fact-based and driven by what is best for our society, our economy and our future. That is comprehensive immigration reform including a path to citizenship for otherwise law-abiding, undocumented people.

The immigration debate is often framed as a dichotomy—we are either "A Nation of Laws" or a "Nation of Immigrants." The reality is that these ideals are not irreconcilable and are, in fact, mutually supportive of one another. We are letting the immigration hawks drive the discussion and pursue policies driven by racism and xenophobia. Immigration, yes, even "illegal immigration," has not hurt this country or led to more crime and lawlessness; in fact, it's the other way around. It is an easily verifiable fact that as the immigrant percentage of the population has grown (since 1970 it is up from 4 percent to roughly 14 percent), crime rates have

fallen and the economy has prospered. We have no crisis because of immigration. If that's not enough evidence to liberalize our immigration policy, I don't know what is.

It would be good, sound economic policy to update our antiquated system of laws and quotas. Excessive wait times for Green Cards hurt U.S. families and the economy. According to the Libertarian Cato Institute, "Nearly three decades have passed since Congress last updated the legal immigration system. During that time, the U.S. economy has doubled, and its population has grown by one-third...Congress should reform the antiquated quotas, enact a limit on wait times, and keep pathways viable for legal immigrants in the 21st century." By hampering America's ability to compete for labor and capital around the world, excessive wait times injure the U.S. economy. Every year the United States loses out on billions of dollars in foreign direct investment that would grow the economy and increase demand for U.S. workers. Immigrants are a net positive to the U.S. Treasury. All immigrants make the GDP of the United States larger by 11 percent annually—about \$2.2 trillion in 2018."

In addition, offering a path to citizenship for otherwise law-abiding, undocumented immigrants, would have huge economic and social benefits. Studies have shown that authorizing an immediate path to citizenship for the estimated 11.5 million undocumented immigrants in the United States would add as much as \$1.4 trillion to the country's economic growth, create more than 200,000 jobs and increase tax revenue by more than \$180 billion in the next decade. These are eye-opening figures.

Our closest economic and geo-political rival, China, has a clear, focused and long-term vision of economic domination. While we are mired in the chaos of the current administrations daily flailings and its manufactured hysteria and draconian immigration policies, they are planning to surpass us technologically, militarily and economically. Liberalizing immigration policy is a major hedge to that plan. America will always dominate if we lead with, and build policy around, our ideals. Current immigration enforcement and detention policies and immigration laws, quotas and the wait times they cause, are damaging our economy by limiting investment in capital, both in the form of hard currency and human capital, and ultimately, seriously hindering our ability to compete in the future.

More restrictive immigration policies, including mass deportations of undocumented people instead of giving them a path to citizenship or some form of permanent legal status, will further hamper our future competitiveness. All of the legitimate research shows that it's time to fix it once and for all.