

# The Press Democrat

## Navarrette: Got workers? No? Then we need immigrants

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On immigration, President Joe Biden doesn't just have bad policies. He also has horrible timing.

What better time to expel, shun and turn away immigrants than when the U.S. economy desperately needs more immigrants?

Biden is doing the politically expedient thing by parroting the restrictionist policies of his predecessor and catering to nativist fears of a border overrun by immigrants and refugees.

Recently, Biden not only reinstated the Trump-era "Remain in Mexico" policy of warehousing asylum seekers south of the border (as he was ordered to do by a federal judge). He also expanded the program to include Haitians and Brazilians (which he was *not* ordered to do by a federal judge).

It's a good thing that Biden isn't a Republican. If he were, the media might call his immigration policies "racist."

Once again, Americans are fed up with immigrants. The last couple of years have been difficult for many of us. Yet our first instinct is to keep out the very folks who make our lives easier?

For example, many immigrants — both legal and undocumented — provide care to the elderly. With more than 70 million Baby Boomers making their way through their 60s and 70s, do you suppose we could use more caregivers for seniors?

It's too bad that the immigration system is so inefficient. According to an estimate by the Cato Institute, there are more than 1.2 million employment-based green card applications stuck in a backlog.

Meanwhile, American employers are facing a worker shortage of historic proportions, and they have been screaming out for more labor. I bet you've seen a dozen "Help Wanted" signs just in the past week.

There were 10.4 million job openings in the United States at the end of September, according to the U.S. Labor Department. Every week, in what has been dubbed by the media "the Great Resignation," thousands of U.S. workers quit their jobs to find a better opportunity, start their own business or embark on a new adventure.

This country's labor market is in crisis. And in response, both political parties have once again shown themselves to be totally useless.

Republicans assured us that the problem was those supposedly extravagant unemployment benefits — an extra \$300 per week from Uncle Sam for out-of-work Americans to pump into the economy during the pandemic. Now those supplements are gone, and people are still leaving their jobs in droves, even if it means joining the ranks of the unemployed. Didn't conservatives argue that cutting benefits would lead to more people working? The opposite happened.

Meanwhile, Democrats told us that the labor shortage was all about greedy employers who refused to pay workers a so-called living wage. Increase paychecks, liberals argued, and people would flock to fill existing job openings. In many industries — most notably, fast-food restaurants — employers raised wages dramatically. They even offered cash incentives to anyone who would simply fill out an application to work. And guess what we got for all that trouble? More job openings.

The world is upside down. It is usually at times of job scarcity that U.S. policy makers move aggressively to keep out new immigrants and expel those who are already in the United States.

Perhaps the most notorious example of this phenomenon occurred during the Great Depression, during which the U.S. unemployment rate soared as high as 25%. In what became known as the Mexican Repatriation, hundreds of thousands of Mexicans and Mexican Americans living in the United States were sent to Mexico from 1929 to 1939. Incredibly, an estimated 40% to 60% of the individuals who were deported — most of them children — were U.S. citizens! So much for legality.

Historians agree that racism played a major role, but so did labor economics. Rep. Martin Dies, D-Texas, wrote in a Chicago newspaper at that time that the “large alien population is the basic cause of unemployment.” Labor unions like the American Federation of Labor argued that deporting Mexicans would free up jobs for U.S. citizens. Then-Secretary of Labor William Doak said deportation was “essential for reducing unemployment.”

On the doorstep of the 2022 midterm elections, White House political advisers are probably telling Biden that he needs to heal a U.S. economy hobbled by worker shortages and also protect the U.S.-Mexico border by keeping out immigrants.

What they're likely not telling him — because they don't seem to know — is how he can do both of these things at the same time.