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Editorial: Trump fumbles on immigration

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Give Donald Trump some credit for meeting with a foreign leader, and for making himself available to the press after his speech Wednesday on immigration policies. But the ideas Trump put forward on immigration are misguided at best and not likely to win the GOP presidential candidate many new voters.

Trump has done a lot of non-presidential things during his campaign. At least meeting with Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto gave him the appearance of a serious candidate. And Trump still offers himself to the media, unlike his Democratic rival Hillary Clinton, who hasn't held a press conference in more than 270 days.

For all the problems with the nation's immigration system—and there are a lot—focusing on the individual actions of certain criminal illegal immigrants is no basis for policy reform. Speakers did so in Cleveland at the Republican National Convention, and Trump continued to do so last week.

While the federal government should have complete control over who is in the country, particularly if they're committing crimes, Trump essentially reiterated that he would overturn the law that allows undocumented immigrants who entered the country before their 16th birthday and before June 2007 to be exempt from deportation.

“Anyone who has entered the United States illegally is subject to deportation. That is what it means to have laws and to have a country. Otherwise, we don't have a country,” he said.

That's not much of a departure from his initial hardline position.

Stories of violently criminal immigrants are anecdotes. The real problems with immigration are bureaucratic and systemic, and require more thoughtful solutions than an expensive wall along the Southern border or a deportation force.

Those ideas may hit home with many Trump supporters, who believe immigrants have stolen their jobs and harmed America's economy and culture. Yet they aren't feasible solutions and would be costly undertakings that would only expose the nation's deeper economic troubles.

Additionally, for all Trump's complaints about illegal immigration, fewer Mexicans are migrating to the U.S. today than in the past, according to the Pew Research Center. Between

2009 and 2014, only 870,000 Mexican nationals came to the U.S. from Mexico, down from 2.9 million between 1995 and 2000.

That says more about America's lagging economy. Mexican nationals are moving back to Mexico for jobs—unemployment there has dipped to just 3.8 percent—and for family reasons.

Regardless, the only reasonable solution to the nation's immigration challenges is comprehensive reform for non-criminal, undocumented immigrants to put them on a path toward a legal status, which includes paying taxes and obtaining a Social Security number.

Most Americans support such common-sense reforms, despite the fact that Congress hasn't been able to get them through.

Trump's focus strictly on Mexican immigrants also ignores the country's inability to process immigrants from other parts of the world, including Asia and Europe, many of whom are highly skilled and in demand in states like Michigan.

According to the Cato Institute's Alex Nowrasteh, "Trump's proposed restrictions on legal immigration could slash the number of green cards issued by up to 62.9 percent."

Real reform would include background checks, a reasonable amount of paperwork to prove identity and family connections, and a system to know who's here that actually works.

Immigrants want to come to the United States because of its economic opportunity and freedoms. Trump's platform encourages Americans to believe otherwise, and it's not a winning message with the majority of voters.

It's getting too late for Trump to pivot away from what has become a central part of his campaign, but it's not too late for real immigration reform.