

Reader Letter | Dispelling immigration myths

7:45 PM, May. 20, 2012

Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shores. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me. I lift my lamp beside the golden door” — from the Statue of Liberty.

The U.S Constitution proclaims, “All people are created equal.”

Even though those are welcoming words, some immigrations laws and attitudes are so contrary to basic principles that our very democracy is at risk. Our country is in danger of losing its identity as a welcoming nation.

Today’s immigrants come from all over the world. Many come because they experience prejudice and mistrust. Drug cartels are dangerous and threaten the lives of others. Drug trafficking across U.S. borders is abetted by U.S. demand for drugs. And despite U.S. employment rates, the demand for foreign workers continues.

False notions such as “immigrants do not pay taxes” are dispelled by the Cato Institute and others. The Social Security “suspense file” (tax money that cannot be matched to a worker) grew at least \$20 million from 1990 to 1998.

It is a myth that immigrants come to take advantage of welfare. Actual findings indicate immigrants come here for jobs and jobs are looking for workers.

Another myth is that immigrants send all their money back to their homelands. Immigrants assist the U.S. economy due to personal living necessities and also put \$162 billion into state, local and federal governments (Cato Institute).

It also is inaccurate to say immigrants take jobs needed by Americans. The Brookings Institution reports that immigrant business owners create jobs for Americans as well as for immigrants. They fill gaps between high- and low-skilled

workers and give an annual tax benefit to the United States of about \$10 billion (National Academy of Sciences and Center for Labor studies).

The myth that “immigrants do not want to become U.S. citizens or learn English” is discounted by the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services who state that 75 percent of immigrants speak English well within 10 years of their arrival. Demand for adult English classes surpasses supply all over the country.

Some Americans believe that U.S. efforts at border control have led to higher rates of illegal immigrants. The reason for the influx often is the lack of legal entry processes (Cato Institute).

The idea that the war on terror can be won by restricting immigration is nixed by the fact that the 9/11 terrorists entered the country legally. Tougher restrictions demonizing immigrants may even cause immigrants to fear giving information to law enforcement.

In spite of such misunderstandings and the inertia in Congress to study and make efforts at compassionate and humane immigration laws, there is still hope. Creating an efficient path to citizenship and a speedy process of naturalization for the undocumented would help Americans and immigrants. All workers would have equal opportunity, a living wage and protection under the law. If Americans would study the situation and view it through the lens of the Golden Rule, intelligent input would lessen tension and lead to a quicker and more human solution.

SISTER THERESINA

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