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States are right to respond to federal crackdown on immigration enforcement

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President Donald Trump's administration is taking a tougher stance on enforcing immigration laws, and that pleases many of his supporters.

This is, after all, a populist president who kicked off his campaign by calling Mexican immigrants "rapists." He won the election, arguably, in large part by campaigning on economic and national security concerns related to immigration.

Now that he's in power, Trump wants to show he can keep his word. He's signed executive orders that signal a policy change on immigration enforcement. Criminals and "bad hombres" are still priorities for deportation. But now, undocumented workers who otherwise have clean records and who previously would have been left alone are increasingly subject to deportation.

Trump and some of his cabinet members are notably irritated by "sanctuary cities" that resist cooperation with federal immigration authorities for various reasons. Amid this showdown, it's no surprise that lawmakers in a blue state like Illinois are proposing new legislation that would set boundaries for federal agents.

Rep. William Davis, of East Hazel Crest, is among the House sponsors of the so-called Illinois Trust Act. A similar bill introduced in the Senate is set for a hearing Wednesday before the Senate Executive Committee.

"We're drawing a bright line" between do's and don'ts for police," Cullerton on Monday said during a Chicago news conference hosted by the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, the Associated Press reported.

The proposal would bar law enforcement from entering state-supported schools or health facilities without a warrant looking for immigrants in the country illegally.

Sen. Dan Harmon, of Oak Park, one of the Senate bill's cosponsors, said in a news release that state and local police are not deputized immigration agents and therefore are not expected to expend resources enforcing or complying with federal civil immigration detainers and administrative warrants.

"Immigrants in Illinois should be able to pick up their children from school or go to the hospital without fear of arrest, and state and local police officers should be assured they're not expected to enforce federal immigration laws," Harmon said in the release.

I think immigration is one of the most fascinating and complex political issues to study and debate. Both sides have valid points to consider and concerns to address.

On the one hand, America is a nation of laws. For decades, immigration laws have been on the books but not enforced. Proponents of stricter enforcement say that allowing undocumented workers to remain is unfair to the millions of people who have legally migrated to the United States over the years.

On the other hand, many take a more compassionate view toward immigration. Millions who entered the country illegally years ago have children who are legal U.S. citizens. The thought of breaking up families strikes many as heartless.

Then there's the reality that taking a hard line against undocumented workers leads to decreased cooperation with law enforcement and actually makes society less safe.

"It is important that undocumented immigrants are able to talk with local police officers to report and help solve crimes without fear of being deported," Harmon said in the release. "Fearful immigrants are withdrawing into the shadows because of the Trump administration's dangerous policies."

Cullerton on Monday stressed that the measure would not keep police from investigating crimes or apprehending suspects.

"But the prevailing criteria to detain an individual should not be based on someone's citizenship, immigration status, background or beliefs, but by the blind exercise of the rule of law," Cullerton said, according to the AP.

The plan also would set deadlines for police to complete paperwork for immigrant crime victims who cooperate in an investigation. Those who cooperate are eligible for special visas that allow temporary residence, but police are often slow or negligent in completing them.

I would prefer Congress tackle the complicated issue of comprehensive immigration reform. But since the executive branch is pushing enforcement in a new direction, I think it's logical for state and local jurisdictions to respond with laws that protect the interests of their residents.

Trump won the election, but he lost the popular vote by the largest margin in history. His victory is hardly a mandate that a majority of Americans want a crackdown on undocumented workers. There are a lot of economic and financial considerations in the debate, as well as a lot of myths that play on fears and misunderstandings about immigrants.

One of the top myths is that immigrants take jobs from Americans. Research says otherwise. The National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine said in September, "There is little evidence that immigration significantly affects the overall employment levels of native-born workers."

Another myth is that immigrants are more likely to commit violent crimes when in fact, research shows the opposite is true. Trump plays to fears about immigrants and crime, announcing during his address to Congress last month the creation of a new office called VOICE — Victims Of Immigration Crime Engagement.

However, academics have studied decades of data and found immigrants are less likely to commit violent crimes than native-born citizens.

Another myth is that immigrants are a drain on welfare programs. In fact, tax revenues from immigrants equal or surpass the costs of government services they consume, Alex Nowrasteh wrote in a Cato Institute piece in August.

"If you're still worried about immigrant use of the welfare state, as I am, then it is far easier and cheaper to build a higher wall around the welfare state, instead of around the country," he wrote.

Trump's promises to build a wall along the southern border and have Mexico pay for it played well to his base of supporters at rallies. But Mexico isn't going to pay for the wall, which would cost taxpayers \$21.6 billion, according to a Reuters estimate.

Those who favor stricter enforcement of immigration policies also need to take into account the increased costs to taxpayers of additional agents, lawyers, judges and detention centers.

Then there's the harsh reality of what goods would cost if America were to deport its 11 million undocumented residents. The American Action Forum released a study last year placing deportation costs at \$400 billion to \$600 billion.

The same study looked at the impact removing undocumented workers would have on agribusiness, construction, hospitality and other industries.

"Not only would it cost the public fiscally, but it would also greatly burden the economy. The labor force would shrink by 6.4 percent or 11 million workers and, as a result, in 20 years the U.S. GDP would be 5.7 percent or \$1.6 trillion lower than it would be without fully enforcing current law," researchers concluded.

The bottom line is, taxpayers would pay dearly to strictly enforce immigration law and consumers would suffer. Plus, I don't see how deporting undocumented workers helps the Trump administration reach its goal of greater economic growth.

These are just a few key considerations in the immigration debate, which is why Congress should take a comprehensive approach to studying the issue. A well-balanced compromise would be the best outcome.

Instead, the Trump administration is taking us down the hard-line path. I think it's good for state and local jurisdictions to consider legislation and ordinances that would limit some of the damage of strict enforcement of immigration policies.