



Wit or wit out

By: Tom Cardella - May 23, 2013

The Cato Institute and the Heritage Foundation are two conservative think tanks. I don't know about you, but when I hear the phrase "think tank," I have this mental picture of old, wise men in togas sitting in a silent conference room, pondering for eight hours a day — not stopping for lunch (steak sandwiches "wit" and "wit out" cheese with fries on the side).

Cato favors the current immigration bill and its members like steak sandwiches "wit" and Heritage is opposed to the bill and its employees like their sandwiches "wit out." Their split (on the bill, not the steak sandwiches) is mirrored in Congress among Republicans. Among other things, the immigration reform bill would require the approximately 11 million illegal immigrants currently living in the United States to go to the back of the line before they can become U.S. citizens and that we spend an additional \$7 billion on border security. The opposition to the bill essentially doesn't want any more immigrants and keeps raising the threshold for approving any reform bill.

The entire mess can be understood better by using the steak sandwich example. Let's say you want to do something about undocumented immigrants in the United States, not because you're a humanitarian, but you think it might add to our national security. We could know the identity of these folks if only to make sure they paid taxes when they work in the gardens of America, mind our kids and pick our fruit. So you come up with a way to do this, making sure you don't tick off those who have come here legally. You make the illegal immigrants wait five years before they can apply for U.S. citizenship. Here's where my steak sandwich example comes into play.

Say the owner of a local steak sandwich shop represents Congress (this is Philly we're talking about here). Immigrants come up to your window all of the time. All you ask is they tell you in "proper" English whether they want their steak "wit or wit out" the cheese. Sometimes the immigrants stumble because "wit" and "wit out" doesn't translate well into their own language, but who cares, they're in America now so they should start acting like Americans.

Your sandwiches are popular so the immigrants keep coming. Soon you single-handedly have succeeded in getting four different Asian languages, as well as Spanish, and Portuguese to come up with words for "wit" and "wit out." All seems well, but the illegal immigrants are impossible to tell from the legal immigrant customers. You have thought about requiring them to show their papers or green cards, as the case may be, but you don't want the damned American Civil Liberties Union and all those other troublemakers on your back. You've thought about moving your shop to Arizona where they would appreciate your efforts at keeping out the "illegals," but who the hell wants to live in the desert, even if the humidity is low when it hits 102? In reality, your Congress is not a

steak shop. You're not worried about customers, you just don't like today's immigrants legal or illegal.

Of course, being a member of Congress is a lot tougher than running a steak sandwich shop because you have to keep getting elected to remain in office. You can't admit what you really want is for these illegal immigrants to go back where they came from, and if they take some of the "legals" back with them, so much the better. What was that Romney term — "self-deportation"? You come up with a strategy: Every time the pro-immigration folks offer an immigration reform plan, you move the goal posts, so to speak. Or better yet, raise the stakes (steaks — get it?).

The opposition is willing to support the following conditions for making the illegal immigrants, currently living in the United States, become legal: Wait five leap years, pass a test on colonial candlestick making, sing the "Star-Spangled Banner" in the correct key (you chuckle over that one), pay back taxes, sacrifice their first born (one less immigrant) and mine our borders with small nuclear devices set to explode at the hint of an accent, no matter how slight. That's their offer, you immediately reject it as "amnesty" and totally inadequate.

You keep offering counterproposals that would add requirements, such as name all of the "American Idol" winners in the history of the show, write an essay on how Shakespeare would have translated "wit" and "wit out" into old English, explain why no group ever protests the Third Amendment of the U.S. Constitution that requires an owner's consent before a soldier can be quartered in their home, predict when Ben Revere will get his first MLB home run, promise to never order Manchego cheese on a steak sandwich or for that matter ever open a competitor steak sandwich shop.

If the reformers agree to those conditions, you've got an ace up your sleeve. Let's see if they'll agree to keep the Italian Market off limits to future immigrants. You call your offer a reasonable path to citizenship.