

Most stereotypes of immigrants are false

Published Saturday, March 27, 2010

On March 21, tens of thousands of immigrant rights supporters gathered in front of the Capitol in Washington, D.C., to renew the call for a more fair and just immigration system in this country. Among the thousands was a busload of southern Minnesota residents that left Owatonna at 7 a.m. on Saturday, organized by Centro Campesino (the farmworker center).

I am grateful for Centro Campesino's efforts. We need a new immigration system in this country. Regardless of our race and ethnicity, we can all benefit from a system based in justice, and compassion and that helps create a truly vibrant economy. This means immigrants and native-born U.S. citizens working together for better wages, working conditions and labor protections for all.

If the past is any predictor of the future, and as the national immigration dialogue begins again, we'll hear plenty of myths shouted out that stereotype today's immigrants as criminals, welfare cheats and job stealers. But these myths should not be interpreted as fact. They certainly don't represent my personal experience these last 10-15 years as southern Minnesota's ethnic complexion has begun to change (again). I am friends with many Mexican immigrants and know that these myths ring just as hollow now as they did when they were applied to my own ancestors, immigrants from Europe in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Nor are these myths borne out by research that shows: 1. Immigrants actually commit fewer crimes than native-born Americans. 2. Undocumented immigrants are not eligible for welfare. 3. Immigration doesn't dampen the economy; instead, it actually benefits it (see studies by the libertarian CATO Institute www.cato.org/immigration).

Annually, the U.S. grants only 5,000 unskilled work visas per year for 500,000 new unskilled jobs. Isn't it time that our immigration system gets a long-deserved fix?

Doug Nopar

Winona

WOULD YOU LIKE TO SHARE THIS STORY?

