



The Other Side: Solve immigration? Stop xenophobia

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June 28, 2018

The Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act championed by President George W. Bush in 2007 was killed by Republicans in the Senate. The Border Security, Economic Opportunity and Immigration Modernization Act championed by President Barack Obama in 2013 passed the Senate with 68 votes but was killed by House Republicans.

Both bills would've hired tens of thousands of border agents, built fencing, repealed the diversity lottery, added merit-based immigration, created guest workers but most importantly, would've put those here illegally on a 13-year pathway to citizenship. Both bills were strongly supported by the public and both were killed by hardliner Republicans screeching about amnesty.

Today, as more immigration bills bite the dust, that hardcore Republican resistance is still present but it's coupled with a president who demagogues the issue like no other. It's hard enough to work our way through a complex issue like immigration without someone constantly lying and obfuscating.

Donald Trump has made MS-13 a national boogeyman. Trump supporters are terrified of this 10,000-member gang that's smaller than the Crips and Bloods and primarily preys on the immigrant population. Since 2012, according to Border Patrol, they've found less than 100 unaccompanied minors with MS-13 ties. Stop fearing desperate people.

Trump has worked hard to make undocumented immigrants synonymous with crime. A slew of recent studies by the University of Wisconsin, Madison; the Cato Institute; and a research paper appearing in the United Kingdom's Migration Letters show that illegal immigration does not drive up the crime rate. The truth is that those who break the misdemeanor law of entering this country unlawfully commit crimes at a lower rate than native-born Americans. We're good at drugs, crime and rape.

It's particularly grotesque that Trump uses the families of those killed by people who entered the country illegally to depict the majority of immigrants as criminals. An illegal entrant who murders an American is no more representative of the thousands of other undocumented immigrants than an active shooter is of all gun owners.

Referring to asylum seekers and economic refugees as "breeding" and "infesting" is fascistic language out of the 1930s. It helps no one.

Trump's demagoguery comes at a terrible time economically. While Trump should be given credit for not screwing up Obama's economy, now that we're at full employment we need workers. A report in the Los Angeles Times this week talks about farms in Napa and Sonoma county offering \$16 an hour for farmworkers, but they can find no takers. Some California farms and wineries are offering subsidized housing, 401 (k) plans and health coverage and still can't find enough workers.

Let's face it: Americans don't want those jobs.

It's not just agriculture. My best friend lives in a retirement home that experiences incredible staff turnover. Nursing homes are chronically understaffed and that often leads to neglect and abuse.

Hotels are in need of maintenance workers.

We need comprehensive reform because our employment answers are on that border. These aren't rapists and killers. The only thing most of them want to kill is a couple of cervezas after a long day of work.

Dispelling more myths, people who enter the country illegally are ineligible for welfare (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families) and food stamps through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP; and Social Security, Medicaid and Medicare. They can receive emergency medical services, assistance through the Women, Infants and Children supplemental nutrition program, or WIC, and public education. Of course, if their children are American citizens, those children are eligible just as any citizen would be.

They also cannot vote. And no study has ever found widespread voting by people here unlawfully, despite the president's lies.

So what do we do? We deserve to have secure borders with strict enforcement. We'll need more manpower and tech to detain and deport those attempting to cross illegally. We need guest workers and a path to citizenship for those already here. But we can't do anything until we accept the facts and stop demonizing. Peace.