

Hartford Courant

Thomas Jefferson sued us for libel ... and lost

What Is Wrong With ICE?

March 28, 2019

Malik Nayeed bin Rehman and Zahida Altaf at an anti-deportation rally March 1 in Hartford. Their 5-year-old daughter, Roniya, stands between them. (Don Stacom / Hartford Courant)

Why do immigration agents have to go after a Pakistani couple with a 5-year-old daughter and a New Britain pizza restaurant? Can't they find any violent criminals to deport?

Malik Nayeed bin Rehman and Zahida Altaf are no threat to society. Nevertheless, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement ordered them to get on a plane to Pakistan last week. Instead, the couple went to a church for sanctuary.

Why ICE insisted they leave is a mystery. The agency didn't return a phone call Monday. The couple had broken no laws beyond overstaying their visas. They've worked hard to make a living and a home here. Their young child is an American citizen. They had hired a lawyer to help them get citizenship, but, sadly, were scammed. Mayor Erin Stewart, a Republican candidate for governor, has called on ICE to review their case.

ICE nevertheless doggedly pursues a senseless campaign to oust productive members of society like them.

You've worked hard, so this year, live it up! Reap the benefits of your tax refund check and enjoy a getaway to Las Vegas.

It is thanks to the First Congregational Church of Old Lyme that the couple is still in the U.S. and able to appeal the deportation order. They're among the half-dozen immigrants who have taken refuge in Connecticut churches with a conscience. Some of the refugees have gotten reprieves.

There was no reprieve, alas, for Joel Colindres. He came to the U.S. from Guatemala in 2004, married an American citizen and had two children, both of whom are young U.S. citizens. He paid his taxes, bought a home, had filed for legal resident status and had no criminal record. Yet he was deported in January.

A Senseless And Cruel Campaign

Mr. Colindres wasn't one of the "bad hombres" that President Trump had promised to go after in his campaign. So why would the president want to rid the nation of homeowners and taxpayers who have broken no laws other than the "crime" of wanting to belong to this nation? Why is Homeland Security hunting down those with good jobs and roots in their communities and putting them on planes?

U.S. Sen. Richard Blumenthal is on point in calling this a "deportation regime that has lost all reason and rationality."

This cruel campaign is not just heartless and needless; it hurts the country.

The vast majority of immigrants are here to work, not to commit crimes. "Fully 91 percent of unauthorized immigrant men ages 18 to 64 were working or looking for work in 2014, compared with 79 percent of U.S.-born men of similar age and 84 percent of lawful immigrants of similar age," says Pew Research Center.

Moreover, this group tends to stay out of trouble. The conservative Cato Institute found that "illegal immigrants are 44 percent less likely to be incarcerated than natives."

And they help the economy. Immigrants make up 21 percent of all entrepreneurs in this state, although they're only 13.7 percent of the state's population, according to the New American Economy.

Yet the Trump administration seems determined to rid the nation of these hardworking, taxpaying, law-abiding workers, no matter what their circumstances.

So it is trying to deport a mother of three in California who has survived two forms of cancer and has no criminal record — not even so much as a parking ticket.

ICE is also holding a doctor in Michigan, although it has been 40 years since he came to the United States from Poland as a young child. He was convicted of two misdemeanors 26 years ago, when he was a teenager. The hospital he works for says his detention "simply does not make sense."

We agree. ICE should be going after drug dealers, thugs, racketeers. Instead, it is wasting time and taxpayer money hounding immigrant doctors, restaurant owners, decent neighbors as if they were dangerous criminals.