

Economics core of immigration fight

by **Ronald L. Trowbridge** - Aug. 10, 2010 12:00 AM
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"Timeout," we say to our defiant kids. "Go sit in the corner until you can behave." We need a timeout for the immigration feud. A curious psychology is at work in this bitter fight: Each side takes a position, then moves backwards to find selective data in support of that position, neglecting data that does not.

More than anything else, the fundamental controversy is about economics.

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement has the capacity to remove "less than 4 percent" of illegal immigrants, says its chief, John T. Morton. Last year, through Sept. 30, a record 387,790 were deported.

Locating, processing and deporting 11 million illegal immigrants would require an immense government task force at a taxpayer cost of \$285 billion, calculates the Center for American Progress. The federal government and the states are worse than broke.

Offset against this staggering cost is the expense of providing for illegal immigrants' free hospital care, free public education and incarceration.

As these immigrants live in the shadows, it is difficult to know the full cost. But Maryland currently has about 250,000 illegal immigrants, at a cost to Marylanders of \$1.4 billion per year in education, medical care and incarceration, reports the Federation for American Immigration Reform.

Extrapolating roughly, this means 11 million illegal immigrants would cost U.S. taxpayers about \$61.6 billion per year. Arizona's 460,000 illegal aliens would cost Arizonans roughly \$2.6 billion per year.

But we do know that illegal immigrants pay sales tax, 30 percent own homes and therefore pay property taxes, and some huge percentage rent apartments, therefore paying property taxes via rental payments.

The number of illegal immigrants and families is actually much larger than 11 million. The Pew Hispanic Center reports that 4 million of the 11 million have children. And McClatchey Newspapers reports that "Hispanics are the only ethnic group now producing more than two children per family." So the total of illegal immigrants with children comes to 19 million-plus. Most of the children are U.S. citizens by dint of birth in the U.S.

President Barack Obama's partial solution is to provide these illegal immigrants with pathways to citizenship. But this proposal outrages most Americans. Granting amnesty is abhorrent to most Americans. But ours is

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a dilemma. We can't find most of the estimated 11-million-to-19-million illegal immigrants because it is too expensive to do so.

In this one sense, it would make sense to give a screened number of immigrants pathways to citizenship, fine them and put them on tax rolls so they will defray some of the costs of benefits they receive. Our getting a half a loaf is better than getting no loaf.

The U. S. could also vastly increase the guest-worker program. The other chief objection is that they bring crime to our country. That is more myth than reality. Dan Griswold, an immigration expert at the Cato Institute, reports that "the crime rate in Arizona in 2008 was the lowest it has been in four decades. In the past decade, as the number of illegal immigrants in (Arizona) grew rapidly, the violent crime rate dropped by 23 percent, and property crime rate by 28 percent."

We should refuse to believe that both sides of the aisle in Congress cannot sit down, like a jury, stop their political posturing, and arrive at some compromise on this stalemate.

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