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Steve Chapman: Legalize immigration

By: **STEVEN CHAPMAN**
Special to the Examiner
June 2, 2010

A lot of Arizonans are upset about illegal immigration, and to learn why, you can't do better than the letter from Arizona State Sen. Sylvia Allen. Widely circulated on the Internet, it provides a pungent statement of the frustrations behind the new law stiffening enforcement -- while confirming that it's the wrong remedy.

People on the border, she writes, "have pleaded for help to stop the daily invasion of humans who cross their property." The migrants damage fences, scatter trash and sometimes perish en route. "One rancher testified that 300 to 1,200 people a DAY come across his ranch," reports Allen.

The illegal entries, she believes, undermine our status as "a nation of laws." With a state budget deficit, "we do not have the money to care for any who are not here legally," she says.

Hers are not the only complaints being heard. Among others: Illegals don't pay taxes. They steal Social Security numbers to get jobs. They drive down wages by working off the books.

All no doubt true. But the legislation assumes that tougher enforcement at the border and within the state will magically banish these problems. In fact, those options have already been tried, and all they have done is make things worse.

The supporters of the law, meanwhile, overlook the obvious. There is a simple way to stop the lawless stream, protect Americans living on the border, improve adherence to law and reduce the costs of accommodating people who have no right to be here.

The solution? Stop focusing on trying to keep illegal immigrants out and start focusing on letting legal immigrants in.

Enforcement-only advocates often say they are not opposed to foreigners coming here as long as they follow the rules and obey the law. They should take a number

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and wait their turn, we are told, like the teeming masses of yore. It makes perfect sense until you discover that for most of those who want to come, legal admission is just about impossible.

"A peaceful, hardworking 24-year-old in Mexico or Central America who knows of a job in the United States for which no Americans are available simply has no legal means of entering the United States," writes policy analyst Daniel Griswold of the libertarian Cato Institute.

Foreigners with in-demand skills, like computer scientists, may get work visas. Close relatives of legal immigrants can also be admitted, though they often have to wait years. But if you don't fit in one of those slots -- well, how do you say "fugheddaboutit" in Spanish?

Griswold suggests a big boost in the number of temporary worker visas, which would mean Mexicans and Nicaraguans would no longer have to undertake a death-defying trek across the Sonoran Desert, or squeeze into the trunk of a smuggler's car, for the privilege of working at a sweaty, low-wage job.

They wouldn't need to swipe Social Security numbers to get counterfeit documents. They would be far more likely to work on the books and pay taxes. They would come under the cover of federal and state labor regulations, so they would no longer undercut native employees.

They would stop enriching Mexican criminal organizations that make a business of human trafficking. They would gain more of a stake in participating in and preserving our way of life.

Xenophobes might fear that expanding legal immigration would produce a big jump in the foreign-born population. That's unlikely, because in this realm, the paradoxical often prevails.

Trying to lock down the border has not stanching the flow of unauthorized newcomers from the south, but it has made the trip much more dangerous and expensive. So illegal foreigners who once came and left now come and stay.

Thirty years ago, nearly half of undocumented arrivals departed within a year. Today, only one in 14 does.

If most of the 12 million illegal immigrants were to gain authorized status, many would feel free to return to their native countries, and some would remain there. Permitting more legal immigrants, oddly, could reduce the number of total immigrants.

If there is any lesson from recent experience, it's that foreigners are going to come here one way or another. The best option is to admit far more of them through wider legal channels. The alternative is to keep Arizona's southernmost ranches as the front line of a war the immigrants don't want and we can't win.

Examiner Columnist Steve Chapman blogs daily at newsblogs.chicagotribune.com/steve_chapman. To find out more about Steve Chapman, and read features by other Creators Syndicate writers and cartoonists, visit the [Creators Syndicate](#) website.

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werewolf357 1 day ago

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This reminds me of a drug legalization argument, with the premise that things couldn't be worse than they are right now, but life experience tells us things can always get worse. I don't see how legalizing current illegals reduces the flow of the ones coming in, it would provide an incentive if I was in their place; second or third major amnesty for illegal entry. "The paradox often prevails" fails to account for higher birth rates among immigrant populations, there's every reason to expect a swelling of lower paid, needy populations if we increase immigration. I think border controls will pay for themselves, if done properly, and are something we need to plan for anyway, given the deteriorating situation in Mexico and the presence of terrorists. If Mexico collapses, are we ready, or are we going to be reactive? Why not be ready, for what will almost certainly happen if they don't turn things around there. This editorial might reflect academic or views in DC, but fails to capture the mood around the country. I don't know why DC (Not just this administration, also the last one) fails to get it; we want control of our borders, we want illegals out, dangerous ones first; it's that simple. We want our safety to be the first priority, and our money the second, start taking us seriously.



Buzz 1 day ago

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Chapman you are dangerously naive. Illegal aliens are breaking our laws and must be apprehended and face serious consequences, or else we are not a nation of laws and therefore are free to pick and choose for ourselves which laws we will recognize. Maybe I don't want to pay taxes, maybe I don't want to obey speed limits or parking regulations or maybe I think that nice camera on display should be mine without paying for it. The list could go on, but the point is that laws must be enforced or we will lose faith in our government's ability to fairly govern and then we will have mahem. The unwillingness of Washington to enforce our laws is criminal and is clearly a political ploy by democrats to gain votes by allowing these lawbreakers to gain entry to entitlement programs and become a stable of dependable voters. We will go down in national bankruptcy if our borders are not secured and lawbreakers are not dealt with and removed. Don't think for a minute those of us who are loyal citizens will not rise up and take matters into our own hands if Washington fails to come to its senses.



Iknowhour 1 day ago

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Enforce our borders like North Korea---Mexico---China do!!!!

Jail them or SHOOT them!!!!



dareisay 1 day ago

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2000 citizens are killed each year by illegal aliens...last year 1.2 million Visa workers were allowed here, even though our own citizens are losing jobs right and left.

Each year we have millions become legal citizens....what do you want from us...the whole world here?

A few years ago, Mexico said they were going to raise taxes to help their own...others had a fit, and said they would move out of Mexico if taxes were raised!

I saw the pictures from their latest march in our streets, the Mexican flag was above the US flag, some of them had the US flag upside down....what other country would allow such lawlessness and demands made upon them by non-citizens?

So, Mexico made up comic style books to tell their people how to cross our borders, how to AVOID the border agents, and who to go to help them get on our government teats!
Some pregnant Mexican women, actually cross the border, go to a hospital parking lot and wait for labor pains....then bingo, a brand new citizen, a new baby carrier, food stamps, formula, etc.

The gall of illegals marching in our streets demanding we change our laws for them....they should be marching and demanding reform in their own countries...as well as our elite politicians should be telling foreign leaders to reform....Heaven knows we have given foreign countries enough money over the years....our pocketbooks are empty, we have our own problems, our own bills and health care to pay for....ENOUGH!



Cantopop88 1 day ago

 gfstiel liked this

Umm...immigration is legal now. Oh, you mean no rules. Great! As a software company CEO I would love to be able to bring in an unlimited number of engineers from China and India with no pesky H1 regs, taxes and legal fees plus they get free healthcare and education K-12. Instead of 150K to an MCSE I'll just pay 100K under the table and the net take home is about the same but I save big. But seriously, love the idea of granting blanket amnesty to everyone who snuck in and cheated on their taxes for 10 years just too bad for all those suckers in India and China waiting their turn, fools.



Lugo 2 hours ago

Tough enforcement has been tried???? Say what??? When did that happen?

What HAS been tried, and obviously doesn't work, is "legalization" - aka amnesty -- which only encourages more people to come pouring in illegally, knowing that they'll be legalized by a future amnesty.

What a truly fatuous opinion piece!



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