

Inquiring Minds for February 17,2017

Topic.. IMMIGRATION REFORM

Moderator.. Al Kaplan

Immigration has been in the headlines during the several years, whether we concern ourselves with the Syrian, etc. situation, the African nations problems, or our own influx from the south. But contrary to widespread opinion, this is nothing new. The movement of peoples to various degrees has been a phenomenon since forever, and our own "problem" have been there as long as we have been a nation. You need only to visit our own immigration museum, sited on Ellis Island to see firsthand the U.S. History.

Presented below are only a few informative pieces delineating the problems that we here in the good old U.S. of A. are facing today.

So let us try to come up with some suggestions and solutions to our problems in the U.S..... for the moment, let the rest of the world go its own way.

Read and consider:

1. Is our southern border that porous and will a Wall fix the leakage

2. Is the southern leakage the only source of illegals? What about the visa overstays which have plagued us for decades??

3. And while we speak of illegals, what about those already here for years? Is it practical to go after the 11 million (?) already on our shores? And many, if not most, pay taxes, are gainfully employed, and are good "citizens" in all other respects.

Is the available employee employment I-9 (Employment Eligibility Verification) form an effective method of "control?"

4. What about the children born here of illegals? There is a 2014 Deferred Action for Parents of Americans (DAPA) order, and the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals order (DACA) ruling, which some are calling for dispensing with, and removing from the books. Have these methodologies worked, or should they be revoked??

5. What about the broad range of potential students and workers under the H programs... students and tech types? Are these programs worth saving, expanding? Are these programs good for the growth of the U.S. economy?

6. What about the Bracero programs during the 40's to the 60's, which permitted temporary immigrants for our agriculture businesses?

7. Should Humanitarian interests be a significant factor?? Syrian refugees?

8. Are our screening methodologies for detecting "baddies" adequate?

Lots of questions, but we must remember, we are here in the U.S. because many, if not most of us, are products of immigration.

Getting right with the law for immigrants

In this tense period in both national and international relations, we're confronted with important security issues.

Rob Jesmer is the campaign manager for FWD.us. (Photo: Special to The News-Press)

In this tense period in both national and international relations, we're confronted with a number of important security issues, all in need of their own respective solutions. One of the issues that seems to be most prevalent is the need for immigration reform. Countless political leaders have laid out ideas for solving this problem, yet in the midst of a tumultuous election cycle, it's easy to replace a sense of resolve to fix these issues with heated rhetoric.

I had the pleasure to recently serve on a panel of speakers at the Kemp Forum on "The Future of Immigrants and America." This panel was a public discussion on U.S. immigration reform featuring leading conservatives from diverse professional fields who were focused on examining the impact of immigration on security, the workforce, our economy and culture. The key takeaway: immigration is an acute national security issue, and Congress should act immediately to both secure the border and create a way for those living here illegally to get right with law. Through a tightly regulated process consisting of background checks, the payment of back taxes, and an extended waiting period, a pathway to citizenship would allow those that are undocumented to come out of the shadows and become productive members of society. To be clear, this would not be blanket amnesty, and necessary steps would have to be taken before citizenship was granted, but this is the consensus type of legislation we must be focused on as 80 percent of Americans support this reform.

Today, whether you're an immigrant or a native-born American, our immigration system is failing you. Yes, we need a strong border, and we need to continue the steps that the Department of Homeland Security has taken to secure our southern border. In the last 10 years, the Border Patrol has almost doubled the amount of agents, and the border now holds more fencing, video surveillance, and aerial vehicles than ever before. These actions are working, as demonstrated by the rapid decrease in illegal crossings, now at an all-time low.

To that end, mass deportation is simply not feasible. Ripping apart families and forcibly removing people from their homes has a real human and economic cost. In fact, the conservative American Action Forum has shown that a deportation only strategy would cost \$620 billion in new government spending, while shrinking the labor force by 11 million workers. This would result in a \$1.7 trillion reduction in real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) – with staggering ramifications for our entire nation. With mass deportation off the table, we need real solutions like immigration reform.

In fact, this rational immigration reform is not only overwhelmingly popular among the general population – but it's supported by a growing percentage of the Republican Party, as well. According to a [poll](#) by 10 prominent GOP pollsters, a proposal that increases border patrol, requires verification of legal status of employees, creates a guest-worker program, and establishes a pathway to citizenship received 81 percent support from self-identified Republicans.

The Republican Party is undergoing an identity crisis, but by taking on immigration reform in 2017, Republicans will have an opportunity to change the narrative. By providing the country a

conservative solution to immigration reform, we can show the nation once again that we can solve real problems and get things done. With Florida being a key state in this election, we hope that voters will play a large role in these efforts to encourage elected officials to fix our broken system so that it works in the best interests of the American people.

Rob Jesmer is the campaign manager for FWD.us, an organization started by key leaders in the tech community to promote policies to keep the United States and its citizens competitive in a global economy — including comprehensive immigration reform and education reform

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A different view of immigrant status that cannot be appreciated by many

Lev Golinkin is the author of the memoir “[A Backpack, a Bear, and Eight Crates of Vodka](#).”

I doubt my mother would pass the “[extreme vetting](#)” process Donald Trump has in mind for refugees seeking a new life in the United States. After 26 years in this country, she still speaks with a heavy accent, misplaces tenses, mumbles. She doesn’t know the Pledge of Allegiance. Her job as a night security guard requires staying awake and making sure the doors stay locked, the perfect position for an immigrant like her.

Before coming to America, Mom was a psychiatrist, working in a busy clinic in the Ukrainian city of Kharkiv. The city’s population was more than a million, but after 30 years as a doctor, she couldn’t run an errand without bumping into a former patient or grateful family member. It used to annoy me as a child, and I’d tug on her arm, impatient to move on. Once we came to the United States, that was no longer a problem.

We know a handful of ex-Soviet refugees with medical degrees who managed to remain doctors once they came to the United States. Most didn’t. They landed at JFK airport; they received three months’ assistance from a refugee resettlement group, secondhand furniture and driving lessons, if they were lucky; and then the bills came. Medical boards and years of sleepless residency are a gantlet for 20-somethings who speak fluent English and have no children. Mom was pushing 50, had no money and couldn’t speak the language. At first she tried to become a nurse, then a nursing aide, then an EKG technician. The closest she got to returning to the medical field was a stint helping an old woman take her meds.

I don’t blame the United States for this. You become a refugee because something has gone terribly wrong, because your life reached a point where your best option meant abandoning your goals, roots, identity and the graves of your forefathers, and placing yourself at the mercy of strangers. Not even the land of opportunity can magically make up for all that, which is why the United States has the best-educated taxi drivers and home health aides in the world. For many, menial labor and humiliation are the price of admission to America. You scrub, you drive, you dream that your children will do better, and you try not to think of the past.

I don’t want Americans to pity my mother; the most obnoxious sound in the world is the cooing tone some people reserve for talking to toddlers and immigrants. I don’t even need Americans to respect her. The only way for them to comprehend the full extent of her sacrifice would be to go through the process themselves: sever all ties and live as perpetual strangers in a foreign land, where the minimum wage is the best hope and dignity comes at a premium. People often ask if it bothers me that Americans take things for granted. I always reply that I think that’s fantastic. One out of [every 113 people](#) on the planet is stateless or internally displaced. We don’t need more.

My one wish is for Americans to appreciate the degree to which my mom and the millions of other stuttering, thick-accented immigrants in menial jobs have already been vetted, and continue to be vetted, every day. They’ve been stripped of their personalities, skills, jokes, opinions, dignity and

dreams by the language barrier. They've been questioned about who they are and what they're doing in this country — by police, store clerks, employers, customers and the ghosts of their past. They've been vetted since they set foot on U.S. soil, they're vetted every time they open their mouths, and they'll continue to be vetted, in an extreme fashion, for the rest of their lives.

When I was a teenager, soaking up English and reveling in my freedom, I was frustrated because I didn't think my mother loved America in the same blind way that I did. Didn't she realize this was the land of new beginnings? How could she retain nostalgia for her old life? Then I grew up and imagined having my education nullified, my career and aspirations destroyed, my communication ability reduced to the level of a child's, and then having to go on knowing that, as far as some were concerned, the lowest, native-born drug dealer would always have a greater claim to this country than I did. And the sickening magnitude of my mom's sacrifice hit me. I'm in awe that she loves the United States at all.

And yet she does, as do so many others. That's the best-kept secret about America. Immigrants respect and cherish this land, not because they're immigrants, but in spite of it. In spite of being reduced to Trojan horses, rabid dogs and poisoned Skittles. In spite of the Trumps in their lives. In spite of all the vetting.

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Edwardo Porter, October 25, NYTimes

At its peak in the 1950s, the Bracero Program provided more than 400,000 temporary work visas to Mexican laborers. Frank Q. Brown/Los Angeles Times

Can anything be done about illegal immigration?

Donald J. Trump's proposal to end illegal immigration — to build a supposedly impregnable wall — is a fake solution. For all intents and purposes, the wall is already there: a fence across large stretches of the southwestern border complemented by drones, sensors and a small army of agents.

It has already failed. [The federal government spent more than \\$200 billion](#) in the last 20 years on immigration enforcement. And the population of unauthorized immigrants swelled to 11 million over the period.

Maybe the answer, instead, lies in another direction. Rather than building a bigger wall, it consists of opening a door in the wall we have. The best way to stop illegal immigration may be for Mexico and the United States to create a legal path for low-skill Mexicans seeking work in the United States.

"When I hear 'Secure the border,' I think that's great, but it's not the solution," said Carlos Gutierrez, who was commerce secretary under President George W. Bush. "We need laws that enable us to get the immigrant workers we need for the economy to work and do it in a legal way that doesn't require employers to resort to a black market."

This might sound like a giveaway to employers seeking to undercut American workers with cheap foreign labor. Neither major party presidential nominee, Hillary Clinton or Mr. Trump, is very likely to embrace the approach in the homestretch of the presidential campaign. And yet it deserves a hearing. In more than half a century, it is the only strategy that has worked.

The idea has been tested before, from the 1940s to the 1960s, under what came to be known as the Bracero Program, named for a Spanish term for laborer who works with his arms. At its peak in the late 1950s, it provided more than 400,000 temporary work visas a year to people from Mexico, most of them employed on farms. Not coincidentally, from the mid-1950s to the mid-

1960s, apprehensions of Mexicans crossing the border unlawfully — a rough measure of rises and falls in illegal immigration — plummeted to near zero.

Now a group of scholars and policy makers that includes Mr. Gutierrez; Ernesto Zedillo, a former president of Mexico; Eliseo Medina, a Mexican union leader; Silvestre Reyes, a former congressman from Texas and Border Patrol chief; and Doris Meissner, a former commissioner of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, have come together to pitch a similar framework as the only viable strategy to end illegal immigration for good.

Their essential point is laid out in “A [Blueprint to Regulate U.S.-Mexico Labor Mobility](#),” just published by the Center for Global Development. Flows of Mexican migrants to the United States have been driven since our grandparents’ day, they note, by the supply and demand for work on either side of the border, regardless of walls and other obstacles thrown in their way.

History suggests that the United States cannot eliminate immigration of low-skilled workers. But the nation can choose what kind of low-skilled immigration it will have, legal or illegal. The former seems undoubtedly better. Legal flows can be managed to the maximum advantage of the economies and workers of Mexico and the United States. Unauthorized flows cannot.

Consider what happened in 1964, when the Labor Department ended the Bracero Program over concern that immigrant farmworkers were depressing agricultural wages. [Farm wages hardly soared](#). Unauthorized immigration did.

Identification cards being issued to farm laborers in 1954, an era when arrests for illegal border crossings were near zero. Frank Q. Brown/Los Angeles Times

Then came the next big immigration law change, during the Reagan administration in 1986. Some 28 million immigrants had arrived illegally in the United States since the end of the Bracero Program, and 23.5 million had left, leaving a net undocumented population of some 4.5 million.

After legalizing three million of them, the Immigration Control and Reform Act also tried to close the border to future flows by threatening to fine employers who hired unauthorized workers. But by 1990, more unauthorized immigrants were in the United States than had been before the change in 1986.

Critics of guest workers have a point. The Bracero Program was deeply flawed. Abuses by employers who routinely violated agreements on wages, safety, housing and the like were widespread. Workers were helpless, bound to a single employer. Though theoretically they could complain of mistreatment, in practice the procedure was useless.

Today, workers on H-2A and H-2B temporary visas, which are granted to somewhat more than 100,000 seasonal workers every year, [still report many abuses](#).

As the “Blueprint” points out, though, these problems can be fixed, especially in a bilateral program managed jointly by Mexico and the United States. It proposes a long list of provisions: Employers in the United States and labor recruitment companies in Mexico would have to apply for certification from their respective governments. Immigrant workers would be protected by American labor law, free to change employers within broad sectors of the economy. Jobs and workers would be matched transparently in a public database managed by American immigration authorities.

Employers would have to pay a fee to recruit Mexican migrants, which would encourage them to hire American workers first. Part of workers’ pay would be withheld in a saving account to be drawn from after they returned to Mexico. And the visa quota for migrant workers would vary annually to fit changing labor market conditions.

These ideas do not amount to comprehensive immigration reform. The authors say nothing of what to do about 11 million undocumented immigrants living in the United States. Nor do they deal with illegal immigrants from other countries.

But they suggest that, as the number of Mexican migrants seeking work in the United States [has decreased from its peak](#), this could be an auspicious time to bundle their proposal into a broader reform effort.

Proposing a large new program for guest workers might sound crazy in the current political environment. Just hear the roar of approval that greets Mr. Trump's proposal for a "big and beautiful wall." Many labor unions remain highly skeptical that the United States needs any guest workers at all. Temporary migrant workers, they argue, are devices used by employers to undercut wages.

This criticism seems off the mark, though. Opponents judge the effects of visa programs for migrant workers by comparing them with an alternative reality with no migration, rather than by comparing them with large-scale unlawful migration. "History since has given reason to question that perspective," the "Blueprint" states.

"It is a difficult political lift, but we've tried other ways for half a century," said Michael Clemens of the Center for Global Development, the chief writer of the "Blueprint." Barring legal immigrant workers will not protect American workers. But it will ensure that illegal immigration persists

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Half a century ago Congress enacted two transformative laws. The Voting Rights Act struck the political system like a lightning bolt. The other law, the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, has been like a time-release capsule whose effects build over time.

It's hard to say which has done more to change American society. But one thing is clear: During this election concerns about the consequences of our post-1965 immigration regime reached critical mass and found their voice. To be sure, the explicit critique focused on illegal immigration rather than the law itself. But it wasn't hard to detect broader worries.

A 2016 immigration [survey](#) by the Public Religion Research Institute and the Brookings Institution found that 21% of Americans say the prospect of the U.S. becoming a majority nonwhite country would "bother" them, up from 14% three years earlier. Among working-class whites, the figure was 28%; among Americans 65 and older, 29%.

Fifty percent of all Americans acknowledged being bothered when they came into contact with immigrants who spoke little or no English, a figure that rose to 58% among seniors and 64% of white working-class Americans.

These sentiments have an explanation—and a history. After decades of mass immigration from eastern and southern Europe after the Civil War, immigrants as a share of the U.S. population surged to nearly 15% early in the 20th century. In reaction, strong nativist and racist movements emerged.

When the U.S. economy lapsed into recession after World War I and fears of foreign-born radicals bent on domestic terrorism rose, the stage was set for restrictive immigration laws—the Emergency Quota Act of 1921, followed by the Immigration Act of 1924. These laws established caps on immigration from individual countries, which had the effect of reducing overall levels of immigration while virtually shutting down immigration from countries deemed undesirable.

In the wake of these laws, immigration from Italy fell by more than 90%. Immigration from southern and eastern Europe, which represented about three-quarters of total immigration between 1900 and 1910, decreased to only one-third of the total during the 1930s.

Despite some changes in the early 1950s, this restrictive immigration regime remained in place until the mid-1960s. Its consequences were momentous. Between 1924 and 1965, the immigrant share of the population fell to only 5% from 15%. Like the Germans and Scandinavians before them, “ethnics” from central and southern Europe were gradually assimilated into white America, a process that many scholars believe contributed to the relatively placid and consensual politics of the postwar decades. All else equal, homogeneity and solidarity are linked.

During the past five decades, this process has been reversed. Since 1965, according to the Pew Research Center, immigration has increased the country’s foreign-born population from 9.6 million to a record 45 million in 2015. As a share of the total population, the foreign-born nearly tripled from 4.8% to 13.9%, approaching the peak reached a century ago. During this period, new immigrants, their children and their grandchildren constituted 55% of U.S. population growth. After transforming their ports of entry, the so-called gateway cities, they gradually spread to smaller towns with no history of demographic diversity.

If current trends continue, Pew predicts, the absolute number of first-generation immigrants will rise still further in the next five decades, to 78.2 million, and the immigrant share of the population will surge to a record high 17.7%.

Native-born Americans may not know these numbers, but they sense them, and many are troubled. The PRRI-Brookings survey found that 66% of Republicans and 77% of Trump supporters were bothered by encounters with non-English-speaking immigrants, compared with 35% of Democrats.

As a country, we can and should place more emphasis on new immigrants acquiring English-language competence and on the process of civic integration. What we cannot do is halt, let alone reverse, the shifts in the composition of our population. Over the past five decades, the white share has declined to 62% from 84%.

Even if we slammed the gates shut tomorrow, Pew demographers project, the white share would continue to decline over the next five decades to 54%. In my son’s lifetime, whites will become a minority. Indeed, their absolute numbers will shrink from today’s 200 million to 181 million in 2065.

Whatever may have been the case in the past, today’s America does not belong to any single group. It belongs to anyone legally admitted to this country who in good faith pledges allegiance to our constitutional and civic norms.

America is not an ethno-state. As our greatest president, Abraham Lincoln, reminded us, it is a nation “conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.” It is a sign of our degraded times that it is necessary to restate what should be obvious to all.