

IMMIGRATION ... THE LIFEBLOOD OF AMERICA

We must encourage *and* control immigration ...

by Vic Berecz

Some say: *11 million ... 14 million ... illegal ... inundated ... don't pay taxes ... living on welfare ... Hispanic ... Muslims ... drug dealers ... terrorists ...* yes, we've heard it all. One-hundred-fifty years ago it was the *Krauts*, then the *Micks*, then the *Chinks*, then the *Waps*, then the *Hunkies*, then ... well, you get the idea.

The first generation of immigrants of every culture were always stigmatized. The first generation of immigrants worked hard at sweat-shop wages and conditions. Many were slow to learn English and to assimilate. But, their children by-and-large learned English, were educated, began to assimilate, and contributed greatly to the success of our nation. In fact, I believe, it is this recurring immigrant experience that is the unique characteristic that made America great. And, it continues to this day! Would we be better off without either a Bobby Jindal or a Sonia Sotomajor?

What is it then that makes people so fearful of immigration? I suspect it's because too many of us see the world as a *Zero-Sum Game* ... anything *they* get, must be taken from *us*. But, America never has been a zero-sum country. We have 400 years of steady growth behind us, whether we were ruled by British kings, slave-holding plantation owners, Democrats, Republicans, or even a Socialist or two (yes, I remember Jasper McLevy and Irving C. Freese). And, we should all remember that America's growth was often fueled by the hard-work and brilliant minds that immigrants and their children brought to us.

Some say: *They broke the law ... so they must be punished*. But, we make the laws and can change the laws ... plus, many laws are not truly *black-and-white*. If a law can be subject to valid interpretation, then criminality becomes subjective ... in the eye of the beholder. In fact, on the subject of immigration, over the years the law has taken wild swings from *opening the flood gates* to *severe repression*. Perhaps Congress should forget the biases and vindictiveness that usually led to the repressive periods.

I would propose that Congress simply once-and-for-all pass a general immigration law that recognizes immigration as a positive force for our country. If immigration is a good thing, immigration law should be positive ... enumerating the well-defined goals, rather than negative ... setting limits or quotas. Congress should then leave it to professionals to implement that law. Such a law would mandate that *U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services* career personnel must, from time-to-time, establish regulations which encourage the desired forms of immigration, with appropriate controls and Congressional oversight.

A fact-of-life is that the ease of modern travel has made enforcement of recent somewhat repressive immigration laws difficult. With widespread acceptance that immigration is a good thing, the question becomes: *How do we gain compliance with future immigration regulations?* I don't believe fences, armed *militias*, or other relics of history are the answer ... rather the answer must come from technology and common-sense.

How about a fool-proof system of universal *ID Cards* as one big step in this direction? I'm not a technical expert on biometrics, so I can't propose the details, but I know the technology exists that can make it happen. If, without the proper ID, jobs and government services are unavailable, future undocumented immigrants would be few and far between – that's just

common-sense. A short-term (maybe seasonal) work permit, as well as foreign student and tourist accommodations, should also be part of such a universal ID card system.

That still leaves us with the problem of the millions of so-called “illegal immigrants” that are here now. We must deal with them carefully and humanely ... in the *American-way* as individuals ... not simply as a pile of trash to be tossed out. I believe, that in the end, some should stay and become permanent residents probably on a path toward citizenship, some may get temporary work permits and return periodically, some will be deported for good, some (hopefully very few) will be imprisoned here.

The related issues of what it takes to become a citizen of the U.S. and what is the meaning of *dual-citizenship* I'll discuss next week. I'll leave further discussion of a “universal ID card” system until October ... your thoughts to help formulate that posting are welcome.

In summary then, let's recognize that we need immigration, and that our goal should be to enact regulations that encourage the most appropriate type of immigration for a given time in history. Let's also recognize that we have the tools to make immigration work, and that's good

... because without immigrants America will stagnate.

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