

The United States Needs Meaningful Immigration Reform, Not A Closed Door of Fear

A recent study from the German Marshall [Fund](#) of the U.S. confirms what those who believe in the real vitality of our nation suspected---the illegal alien debate is negatively affecting American perceptions of legal immigration.

Now, 54 percent, of our population view legal immigration as a problem rather than an opportunity, while nearly half, 48 percent, of Americans believe there are too many immigrants in the country. It gets better. When asked what portion of the US population was foreign born, respondents said 35 percent, more than twice the real figure of 14 percent.

The reality of legal immigration

Americans must understand that legal immigrants to this nation include the highly skilled, educated, motivated foreign nationals eager to participate in and contribute to our local, state and national economies. Like the most recent roster of American Nobel Prize winners, two-thirds of whom were immigrants to this nation. Just as, in estimates as recent as 2006, nearly half of Silicon Valley companies being founded by immigrants, pumping an estimated \$500 billion into the economy and creating tens of thousands of jobs. "Fresh" people means achiever personalities; new ideas; healthy competition.

We are not talking about the undocumented or people who threaten our domestic or foreign security. Those are separate discussions. We are talking about scientists, engineers, mathematicians and idea people, doctors, nurses and other health care workers, and university teachers, prospective business owners and investors. Those trained in finance, business, environmental sciences and dozens of other areas upon which our nation's global competitiveness must reside and grow.

It's time to counterattack

Immigration hysteria is regrettable, even if understandable. Anti-immigrant crusaders want to disregard the historic tradition of the United States and close our borders to everyone because, frankly, they fear the current wave of legal immigration primarily Hispanic and Asian.

The same reactionary forces have surfaced in the past. At times of economic stress, people focus on immigrants as scapegoats; as the cause for the loss of jobs and reductions in wages. Only the "names" have changed.

We must raise the level of the debate and address the real cause of our economic malaise, undoubtedly, part of which is not encouraging enough of the new ideas and energies that talented legal immigrants have always brought to this nation. We must refute mistaken, prejudicial Nativist sentiments and disinformation about "family values" and "drain on services." Newer immigrants have lower rates of crime and use of health services and benefits than native U.S. residents. For example, Arizona's crime rates fell during the past ten years when immigration rose dramatically. Those are the facts.

Some useful approaches

Certainly, we must have comprehensive immigration reform to ensure secure borders. However, we must have a system of legal immigration which meets the nation's 21st century needs in order to lessen dependence on illegal immigration. As New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg said recently, "Our immigration policy is national suicide. We educate the best and the brightest and then we don't give them a green card we want people to create jobs but we won't let entrepreneurs from

around the world come here."

Congress should:

◆ Revise the employment- and investment-related provisions of current law to allow small businesses and lower level investments to readily qualify. The current provisions requiring \$500,000 to \$1 million from investors fail to recognize that small businesses create far more jobs than large ones. Many high tech and other start-ups simply don't require that much capital.

◆ Enact a program similar to the Kaufman Foundation's

"Founder's Visa" to bring in talented idea people who aren't necessarily the investors, again with a lower investment threshold and permitting investments by approved venture or angel capital businesses.

◆ Avoid counterproductive measures such as the so-called Employ America Act which would shut down all visa programs for an employer if the employer is required to issue a WARN Act notice, regardless of the location or type of layoffs involved. Imagine that Chrysler has to close a money-losing facility, and then Sergio Marchione and the Fiat designers and engineers who are helping to reinvent Chrysler would have to pack their bags and go home putting Chrysler jobs and taxpayer funds at risk. Wasn't it Congress which told Chrysler to marry Fiat and cut costs in the first place?

The administration could right now direct federal agencies involved in immigration decision making to make the approval process for start-up and other smaller businesses less burdensome while still weeding out those who seek to game the system.

We must compete globally by transferring talent and investment in our direction. Most importantly, we must regain confidence in a pluralistic society with a rich diversity of cultures, ideas and ambitions. Welcoming and nurturing talented and motivated newcomers, these legal immigrants, makes great practical sense and is consistent with our heritage as a nation of opportunity.