

U.S. immigration policy reveals who we really are

By Sheldon Richman
SPECIAL TO THE POST

The new compromise immigration bill is drawing lots of flak, not least from conservatives who object to granting amnesty to millions of so-called illegal aliens in the country. (I prefer to think of them as independent migrants.) Here I have to agree with the conservatives. The illegals shouldn't be granted amnesty. Amnesty connotes forgiveness for doing something wrong? and they have done nothing wrong. Indeed, the government should be asking forgiveness from them.

But they broke the law to get into the country. Did they? They weren't under the jurisdiction of the U.S. government until after they entered the country. It's amusing that conservatives think illegals are covered by the law but not by the Constitution. Talk about having it both ways. The Constitution and Bill of Rights do not distinguish between citizens and noncitizens. Besides, there is no obligation to obey an immoral law.

But they came into our country without permission, conservative talker Tucker Carlson and his ilk say incessantly. Without whose permission? The whole population of the United States? The federal government? Why the assumption that either of those aggregates can have the right to give or withhold permission for someone to relocate here? This is a country, not a country club, and rights are natural not national. If someone wants to come here and can do so without trespassing on private property, that's his right and his own business.

Which brings us to something that conservatives need to explain. Why do they applaud "tough sanctions" against employers who hire illegals? Aren't they advocates of free enterprise? It turns out they are as enthusiastic for social engineering as any state socialist. They are willing to curtail economic freedom when it clashes with their cherished goal of planning the composition of the U.S. population. With friends like these, free enterprise hardly needs enemies. Their demand for tamper-proof identification doesn't flatter them either.

If conservatives don't like the guest-worker aspect of the immigration bill, I'm with them. But my reasons are different. How degrading such a program is. Mr. and Ms. Immigrant, we don't want you to move here as a free person to live and work as you wish. But we are happy to bring you here for a few years to do some heavy lifting, after which we will send you back.

Dash that. The nativists can't quite make up their minds whether their chief fear about immigrants is jobs and wages or welfare. No need to lose sleep over either. Immigrants are consumers as well as workers, so they help expand the market and summon more production into existence. The fear about wages is misplaced, since the small effect is quickly offset by the demand immigrants add to the market and the increased investment they make possible.

As for welfare, conservatives really ought to be ashamed of themselves. Even if immigrants wanted to live off the taxpayers (they don't seem to), why would conservatives try to save the welfare state from such straws? There is no better way to convince the American people to dump the welfare state than to show them it is financially unsustainable.

As for the stresses on schools and hospitals, it's been said once but apparently needs to be said again: only government services abhor an increase in the number of customers. Private retailers don't lobby against letting more consumers into the country.

Immigration is an emblematic issue. What kind of country are we if we refuse to recognize such a basic right as the right to move?

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THE IN BOX

N.C. Dance Theatre thanks West Charlotte High drum line

The writer is president and artistic director of North Carolina Dance Theatre.

North Carolina Dance Theatre would like to thank the students in the West Charlotte High School drum line, their parents, band director Melvin Wright and percussion instructor James Dade, for their participation in our production of Rhythm & Moves. For the past few weeks, these students have devoted their time and talents to help make the last show of our season something very special.

The Belk Theater came alive this past weekend as the drum line burst through the audience and on stage during Uri Sands' world premiere of All in Your Trunk. These students should be very proud of their exceptional performance, and on behalf of NC Dance Theatre staff and dancers, I would like to thank them for sharing their sensational talents.

*Jean-Pierre Bonnefoux
Charlotte*

Choosing which children will live, die or suffer

Uninsured Americans shouldn't be sentenced to poor health care with limited access to pediatricians

Health coverage in America shouldn't be like the stock market that dispassionately picks winners and losers. But insufficient funding of government health insurance programs combined with barriers limiting access to coverage has created a system where some children get health care and others don't.



MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

The result is that 9 million uninsured children in America have become losers and are written off like a declining stock. This year, Congress must pass—and the President must sign—a bill that will provide easy access to comprehensive health coverage for all children.

It comes down to a life and death choice for children like Camilla Tecsny, 12, who requires daily therapeutic treatments and medication for Cystic Fibrosis, a disease that attacks her lungs and digestive system. Camilla is a bright, articulate child. She describes herself as a typical girl from New York City who likes to watch TV, talk on the phone and hang out with her friends. When she gets sick, however, there's nothing typical about what she has to endure. Fluid clogs her lungs and she struggles to breathe, suffering violent coughing spells. These bouts of sickness are accompanied by diarrhea and dramatic weight loss. Her lungs are left scarred putting her at greater risk of future attacks.

Camilla is not the only member of the Tecsny family with health problems. Her mother, Luminita, who is an office manager, has diabetes. Her twice-daily insulin shots are covered by her employer's health plan, but Camilla's father, Sandor, a colon cancer survivor, works as a taxi driver and has no health insurance.

Luminita and Sandor fled Romania when it was ruled by a communist dictator and came to America 30 years ago for a better life. Camilla and her older sister, Christina, were born in the United States. The family traveled to Hungary in 1997 after the fall of communism, and each of them was approved for full health insurance on the day they arrived. The promise of free health care induced the Tecsny family to move to the Eastern European country for a four-year stay. Although Camilla was a U.S. citizen, she had the benefit of free doctor's visits and medication. In addition, Sandor had surgery for his colon cancer. When they returned to America, securing health care was a decidedly different matter.

Luminita has had to seek help from the Children's Aid Society to enroll her children in Medicaid through New York's Community Premier Plus program. But the family must pay the full cost of the program at \$150 per child each month or a total of \$300 a month, because Luminita and Sandor's combined incomes are between 250 and 300 percent above the poverty level (about \$56,000 a year). While the Tecsny family has little choice but to pay this costly premium, they cannot afford to cover the whole family. Thus, they had to make the agonizing choice of not buying health coverage for the father who requires monitoring and follow-up care.

In March 2007, Community Premier Plus officials denied a request for Camilla to receive Pulmozyme, an expensive therapeutic treatment taken with an inhaler to clear her lungs and enable her to breathe normally. For 12 days she suffered while her mother fought to secure this vital medication. Luminita had to make numerous calls to the state insurance office to get through to someone who would approve the child's access to Pulmozyme, and often got a recording with instructions to leave a message. "I didn't know where to go or what to do," she said. "I still don't know what's going to happen the next time that we're in the same situation." Luminita asked, "What will happen to my child? Is she going to die because somebody forgot to give the approval for her Pulmozyme?"

It is ludicrous that a family should have to leave the United States, the richest country on earth, to move their American-born daughters to an Eastern European country to secure uninterrupted health care. As long as there are barriers blocking eligible children from receiving health coverage for care, Congress and the White House, in effect, are saying to millions of uninsured children, "We choose not to cover your health care." Writing these children off can never be acceptable. Legislation must be enacted this year to guarantee comprehensive health services for all children and pregnant women in America. CDF supports a bill introduced by Congressman Bobby Scott (D-Va.), the All Healthy Children Act (H.R. 1688), to achieve this goal. We must not delay. If we can throw half a trillion dollars at a war of choice in Iraq, we certainly have the resources to pay for the care of all our children. For more information, please go to www.childrensdefense.org/healthychild.

MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN is president of the Children's Defense Fund.

Court decision on school integration could return us to pre-Brown days

Just in time for the school year's end, the U.S. Supreme Court is poised to decide on two school-assignment plans used to voluntarily maintain racial integration in Seattle and Louisville, possibly taking the nation back to the days before Brown v. The Board of Education, the landmark decision that deemed segregated schools unconstitutional because they violated the equal protection clause of the U.S. Constitution. The decision served to launch the civil rights movement.



MARC MORIAL

In the more than 50 years after the momentous ruling, the United States is still not completely integrated - even in the public schools. But the nations made some progress, thanks in part to voluntary integration plans in which localities as opposed to federal authorities determine how to prevent schools from re-segregating.

The two cases that have prompted the high court's recent review, Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1 and Meredith v. Jefferson County Board of Education et. al., were filed by two individual students denied their first choice of schools because their enrollment would upset the racial balance. The plaintiffs contend that local school officials relied too heavily on race in determining admission.

Should the Supreme Court overturn decisions made by two lower courts, it will establish a adverse precedent that would probably force hundreds of school districts nationwide to revise or even dismantle similar efforts. That could possibly lead to a mass re-segregation, which is the last thing our nation needs if we hope to close the educational achievement gap that exists between minority and white students nationwide.

In an amicus brief we filed with the court in October, the National Urban League informed the court that it would be a fallacy to suggest that by not considering race at all - i.e. by ignoring de facto neighborhood segregation - the Seattle School District would somehow be acting in a "race-neutral" fashion when a return to a school system that does not take race into account would mean that the schools would be distinguished solely by race."

Districts that have implemented race-neutral school assignment plans after having used race as a factor have seen reversals in their integration efforts. For example, in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools district in North Carolina, the number of segregated schools jumped from 47 to 97 after the district implemented a race-neutral plan in 2002. The number of schools with more than 90 percent minority enrollment more than doubled.

In late 2006 when the high court heard oral arguments for the Seattle and Louisville cases, the New York Times' Linda Greenhouse suggested that there seemed little prospect that both school assignment programs would "survive the hostile scrutiny of the court's new majority." One or the other - or both - appeared headed for being struck down, she wrote in a December story.

In 2005, the high court refused to review a similar school-assignment plan in Massachusetts, thanks in part to moderate now-retired Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, who was replaced by the more conservative Justice Samuel A. Alito, Jr.

With Alito on board, the court is much more likely to view such programs with a very critical eye. "The debate among the justices was over whether measures designed to maintain or achieve integration should be subjected to the same harsh scrutiny to which Brown v. Board of Education subjected the regime of official segregation. In the view of the conservative majority, the answer was yes," Greenhouse observed.

Ample research has shown that students, especially minorities, thrive in integrated schools compared to their counterparts in majority-minority schools. Diversity is key to helping students - future voting citizens of this nation - develop core democratic values and an appreciation for a wide range of viewpoints. The more isolated they are from other populations the less likely they are going to tolerate diverse points of view. And that is just a recipe if taken to extremes - for political and social upheaval in a democracy that prides itself on being a melting pot.

As the New York Times pointed out in a December 2006 editorial, the federal government, which championed integration during the civil rights era, has lent its support for the cases encouraging re-segregation. How ironic is that?

Let us just hope the U.S. Supreme Court doesn't fall prey to the same hypocrisy and uses equal protection as a reason to re-segregate our national schools.

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Equal pay for equal work not a reality 44 years after law

On April 24, this great nation commemorated equal pay day, a day dedicated to highlighting the need for equal pay for workers across America.



U.S. REP. AL GREEN

In 1963 President John F. Kennedy signed the Equal Pay Act into law which required that men and women be given equal pay for equal work. However, 44 years after the passage of this landmark piece of legislation, inequality is still an obstacle for

many hard-working Americans.

Equal Pay Day reminds us that in spite of the declaration of independence, in spite of the constitution, in spite of the civil rights laws, women are still being discriminated against when it comes to equality of pay.

Since the Equal Pay Act was signed into law, the wage gap between men and women has only been closing at a slow rate.

In 1963, when the Equal Pay Act was signed, women who worked full-time, year-round made 59 cents on average for every dollar earned by men. In 2006, women earned 76 and one half cents for every dollar

men earned, a disparity of 23 and half cents. No disrespect intended, and in a sense of hyperbole, I don't know a man worth 23 and a half cents more than a woman.

As bad as this is, the details are worse. The empirical data is shameful, disgraceful, dishonorable, and downright sinful.

According to a report released by the American Association of University Educated Women (AAUW), women make only 80 percent of the salaries their male peers do one year after college.

The study also shows that after 10 years in the workforce, the gap between

men and women's pay widens even further. It is shameful for high school male teachers to earn an average pay of \$49,660 per year, while their female counterparts earn \$42,848 per year - with the same tenure and credentials. It's disgraceful for male marketing and sales managers to earn an average pay of \$74,932 per year while their female counterparts earn \$46,696 per year.

It's dishonorable for male physicians to earn an average pay of \$97,448 per year while their female counterparts earn \$50,856 per year.

Although the Equal Pay Act of 1963 required that men and women be given

equal pay for equal work, many hard-working American women and their families are still adversely affected by the wage gap. All working Americans, regardless of their gender, deserve the right to earn equal pay for equal work. Inequality in the work place is not a partisan issue, it is an American issue. This is an issue which impacts the foundation of our nation and the strength of our families.

We cannot allow wage inequity to persist while we can and should do something about it.

As Dr. King once said, "Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about

things that matter." Pay disparity between men and women is definitely an issue that strikes at the core of the American values of honest pay for an honest days work.

We must do all that we can to eliminate this unfair treatment and move towards closing the wage gap for American women. We can and should pass the Paycheck Fairness Act which strengthens the Equal Pay Act of 1963. We owe it to the women we know and love, as well as our country.

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