

No-fault immigrants

Can we all agree that the children of illegal immigrants are no more at fault for being here than is the driver of a car hit by someone without a valid license while legally entering an intersection?

Last Friday, the President raised the stakes in the immigration debate by announcing an enforcement 'slow-walk' of deportation for approx. 800,000 illegal immigrants who came here involuntarily as teenagers or younger. This will increase support for the President from some ethnic communities, but the one he wants the most is the Hispanic community. What his administration forgets is that most Hispanics are law-abiding citizens and look down on those who break our laws. I firmly believe that most Hispanic voters are like any other voter. They vote their conscience and not their ethnicity.

It's anyone's guess whether the President has the right under the "Immigration and Nationality Act" to set the pace for identifying and deporting illegal aliens like *no-fault immigrants*, but if his authority is challenged it will undoubtedly result in a brouhaha costing millions of taxpayer dollars, time and political capital. Our immigration policy must be discussed, but not in a piecemeal fashion, and neither party really wants the whole issue debated months before an important election because both parties could lose important votes.

There is an aspect of Mr. Obama's policy that could end up hurting all of us...the infusion of 800,000 new workers into an already dismal and growing unemployment situation. This will certainly anger the millions of unemployed workers, and that could translate into opposition to candidate Obama come November. The plight of the no-fault immigrant is clear. They are not to blame for the sins of their fathers (or mothers). While deporting them would be justified in the eyes of the law, it would hardly be consistent with the culture of a compassionate country.

There is a way forward that could please both the absolutists and the relativists in this debate. A special status should be created for them: *no-fault immigrants*. Those without felony convictions, who are under 21 and who can demonstrate that they came here involuntarily would be permitted to stay. They would need to register with Homeland Security and the State Department within a specific time period and then apply for a temporary residency card. Then they must get a social security number and a work permit from a special office in either HS or the Department of Labor.

They would not be allowed to collect food stamps or welfare benefits but would be allowed to collect unemployment benefits like anybody else. Finally, they would be fingerprinted and issued a special forgery-proof ID card, submit to annual interviews by HS for a five-year period and have their income tax records reviewed by the IRS. Before the end of five years they would have two choices: be deported to the country of their birth or apply for U.S. citizenship. Should they choose to apply for U.S. citizenship, they would follow the same procedure that all would-be citizens follow: return to their home country, submit an application at the American Embassy and wait their turn to be processed behind all those who came before them.

The United States should not be in the business of breaking up families but neither should we turn a blind eye to our existing immigration laws. If we don't find a solution now, we will soon have to deal with the next generation of no-fault immigrants.

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