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Getting an Initial Handle On Immigration Reform

By Michael W. Thompson

8/5/2016 -- One of the issues that continues to confront our nation is what to do about those illegal residents living in our communities now and how to reform the entire immigration and naturalization system. A few ideas toward that end are outlined herein.

First, we have to secure our borders. Whatever Congress decides, it is clear that our borders need to be more secure. That's step one to bringing a solution to our immigration problem in this country.

Second is terminology. I have found that those immigrants who have come to our country under the existing laws, are very proud to be immigrant Americans. To them being an immigrant is, by definition, someone who has come to this country legally. And to refer to those who are not here legally as "illegal immigrants" is offensive to those who are legally here, those who are American citizens, and those who are working toward citizenship. So let's talk about "illegal residents."

One creative solution to consider comes from the Vernon Kriebel Foundation in Colorado. Recognizing that both high tech and agricultural companies are unable to find enough workers, Kriebel proposes a simple way for non-citizen workers and their families to legally come to the U.S. for specific jobs and for a specific period of time – for temporary workers filling jobs that are needed to be filled right now. A Red Card that would allow workers to enter the country for a specific job and keep track of those people while they are here. A new non-citizen work permit would be issued for a specific job waiting for this person. These non-citizen workers would go through a background check and return home at the end of their employment. By one estimate, this would stop up to 90 percent of illegal border crossings and free up the resources and manpower needed to control the border. Other estimates are that 40% of those living here illegally do not want to stay but are here to make good money and to send that money home to their families. The Red Card might be a solution to make these folks legal as well (see here:<http://redcardsolution.com/index.php/about-red-card>).

Let's increase the number of H1B1 visas for technology experts from other countries as long as we are not "minting" enough technology folks within our own borders. One concern might be that we will be employing technology workers, giving them substantial knowledge and training, and then they go back to their home country and compete against us. Another is that we

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should be hiring US citizens for these jobs. My bet is that our economy can use as many technology workers as we can produce ourselves and that we can bring here through an expanded H1B1 program. There are many job openings in the technology field right now that are not filled.

What about those high school students who are not US citizens and who came over here at an early age with their parents who are illegal residents? How to handle these kids who acclimated to our society, are Americans in their outlook and behavior and have excelled in high school? Many say they should not be eligible for in-state college tuition. However, this might be a better idea: if a young person excels in high school, competes and is accepted into a state college or university but is an illegal resident, then let them attend as an in-state student as they work toward U.S. citizenship. And they can only graduate if they have become citizens within that four year period of time. This means we have to speed up the citizenship process as part of a complete immigration system overhaul.

How do we handle the 11,000,000 or more illegal residents now here in the United States? This is not as tricky as it sounds. The Red Card Solution mentioned above could handle a large percentage of these people in a sensible way. Here is another idea. After the borders are secure, give those who are here illegally two options. Option one: go back to their home country, get in line, secure a visa, pay a fine for being here illegally, and come back into the US legally. Option two: after a background check give this person legal status, they pay a fine over a period of time, but U.S. citizenship is never allowed. This takes the political issue of voting off the table, brings these folks out of the shadows, and they become taxpaying members of our society. The issue that will have to be settled is how to handle government programs for these folks – welfare, social security, Medicaid and Medicare, etc. But reasonable people ought to be able to develop a reasonable way to handle these issues once those who are illegal residents today become legal residents and start paying taxes.

This issue of illegal residents can be handled creatively, humanely and with the support of most in our communities.

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