



First a Wall -- Then Amnesty

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Every sensible immigration policy has two objectives: (1) to regain control of our borders so that it is we who decide who enters and (2) to find a way to normalize and legalize the situation of the 11 million illegals among us.

Start with the second. No one of good will wants to see these 11 million suffer. But the obvious problem is that legalization creates an enormous incentive for new illegals to come.

We say, of course, that this will be the very last, very final, never-again, we're-not-kidding-this-time amnesty. The problem is that we say exactly the same thing with every new reform. And everyone knows it's phony.

What do you think was said in 1986 when we passed the Simpson-Mazzoli immigration reform? It turned into the largest legalization program in American history -- nearly 3 million people got permanent residency. And we are now back at it

again with 11 million more illegals in our midst.

How can it be otherwise? We already have a river of people coming every day knowing they're going to be illegal and perhaps even exploited. They come nonetheless. The newest amnesty -- the "earned legalization" being dangled in front of them by proposed Senate legislation -- can only increase the flow.

Those who think employer sanctions will control immigration are dreaming. Employer sanctions were the heart of Simpson-Mazzoli. They are not only useless; they are pernicious. They turn employers into enforcers of border control. That is the job of government, not landscapers.

The irony of this whole debate, which is bitterly splitting the country along partisan, geographic and ethnic lines, is that there is a silver bullet that would not just solve the problem but

also create a national consensus behind it.

My proposition is this: A vast number of Americans who oppose legalization and fear new waves of immigration would change their minds if we could radically reduce new -- i.e., future -- illegal immigration.

Forget employer sanctions. Build a barrier. It is simply ridiculous to say it cannot be done. If one fence won't do it, then build a second 100 yards behind it. And then build a road for patrols in between. Put in cameras. Put in sensors. Put out lots of patrols.

Can't be done? Israel's border fence has been extraordinarily successful in keeping out potential infiltrators who are far more determined than mere immigrants. Nor have very many North Koreans crossed into South Korea in the past 50 years.

Of course it will be ugly. So are the concrete barriers to keep truck bombs from driving into the White House. But sometimes necessity trumps aesthetics. And don't tell me that this is our Berlin Wall. When you build a wall to keep people in, that's a prison. When you build a wall to keep people out, that's an expression of sovereignty. The fence around your house is a perfectly legitimate expression of your desire to control who comes into your house to eat, sleep and use the facilities. It imprisons no one.

Of course, no barrier will be fool-proof. But it doesn't have to be. It simply has to reduce the river of illegals to a manageable trickle. Once we can do that, everything becomes

possible -- most especially, humanizing the situation of our 11 million illegals.

If the government can demonstrate that it can control future immigration, there will be infinitely less resistance to dealing generously with the residual population of past immigration. And, as Mickey Kaus and others have suggested, that may require that the two provisions be sequenced. First, radical border control by physical means. Then, shortly thereafter, radical legalization of those already here. To achieve national consensus on legalization, we will need a short lag time between the two provisions, perhaps a year or two, to demonstrate to the skeptics that the current wave of illegals is indeed the last.

This is no time for mushy compromise. A solution requires two acts of national will: the ugly act of putting up a fence and the supremely generous act of absorbing as ultimately full citizens those who broke our laws to come to America.

This is not a compromise meant to appease both sides without achieving anything. It is not some piece of hybrid legislation that arbitrarily divides illegals into those with five-year-old "roots" in America and those without, or some such mischief-making nonsense.

This is full amnesty (earned with back taxes and learning English and the like) with full border control. If we do it right, not only will we solve the problem, we will get it done as one nation.