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Blog: Immigration Reform

IMMIGRATION REFORM

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Our country has advanced tremendously from the contributions of diverse people who have immigrated here. The United States has provided a better life for many immigrants, including my family who moved to the United States when I was eight years old. One of President Obama's goals before the end of his term was to admit thousands of Syrian refugees who were displaced after the civil war, which he accomplished during this past fiscal year.¹ Reaching a decision on a solid proposal for immigration reform has divided presidential candidates during many election cycles, and last year was no different.²

Our immigration system is broken, and there is a sharp divide between the Republicans and Democrats on what a wide-ranging immigration policy should entail.³ The American people have shifted their focus during this election to the Hispanic community and the issues they face in our current political climate.⁴ However, as of three years ago, India and China outshone Mexico for those who arrived legally through work, student, or family visas.⁵ In this past election, immigration was a primary focus as our candidates fought tooth and nail over the issue of undocumented immigrants.⁶

In 1921, the Emergency Quota Act was enacted to allow only three percent of the foreign born population into the United States, capping the annual amount of people at 350,000.⁷ This quickly changed as people started coming into the United States illegally due to the severe restrictions implemented.⁸ In 1924, the U.S. established a Border Patrol as a federal law enforcement agency to combat illegal immigration and trafficking

along the borders between inspection stations.⁹ About forty years later, the landmark Immigration and Nationality Act created a new system favoring family reunification.¹⁰

Immigrants bring innovative ideas and businesses to our economy. They provide a network for international markets and improve our country's ability to trade and invest in the global economy.¹¹ Drawing people from different parts of the world has also had a significant and positive impact on our community. Contrary to popular belief, immigrants do not push Americans out of jobs. Instead, they are employed at positions that Americans cannot or will not fill.¹² Immigrants fill positions on the high-skill end of the spectrum such as medicine, engineering, and computer science, especially tech companies at Silicon Valley.¹³ They also fill jobs on the low-skill end of spectrum that include hotel service, restaurants, and construction are also filled by a majority of immigrants.¹⁴ Our immigration policy has been so concerned with immigrants and the "threats" they pose to our national security; we have overlooked the advantages they bring to our society.¹⁵ Closing our doors would be a detrimental move against those who come here to work, to build a better life for their families, and who enrich our economy.

Immigrants are currently facing a lack of due process protections, and these protections must be restored.¹⁶ While Democrats support a path to citizenship for illegal immigrants, Republicans support stronger border patrols and harsher repercussions for those caught illegally.¹⁷ Presently, there are around eleven million

undocumented immigrants residing in our country.¹⁸ Despite contributing billions of dollars to the economy, undocumented immigrants are not provided the same privileges and opportunities as citizens.¹⁹ They do not have the same access to healthcare, education, and public services as Americans and legal immigrants do.²⁰

The Trump administration has already changed the direction of its immigration agenda. Over the last few months, we have heard many propositions of their agenda. An example of one of their arguments is that, in the last thirty years, a large portion of immigrants were high school dropouts, so the low-skill work force were the core group of Americans.²¹ It is true that identifying trade-offs are a more reasonable step toward a stronger immigration policy, but building a 2,000 mile high wall along the border of Texas does not resolve the dropout rate or change the demographic of our workforce. Another example is that the Obama administration explicitly noted that an undocumented immigrant must be convicted of an offense to be deported. Trump's language suggests otherwise, that a person need not be convicted of a crime to be considered for a removal. These are just a few of the issues that do not justify the tradeoffs expressed by anti-immigrant groups.

Any advantages of implementing Trump's immigration policy should outweigh any unfair prejudice it may cause to the millions of immigrants living in the country. Undocumented people have put down roots, married into families, and shared similar burdens as everyone. Over five million U.S. citizens have undocumented parents, and deporting them will leave their children parentless, tearing their lives apart. In this first month alone, we have utilized every tool to combat this impractical policy. Congress has come close in recent years to a bipartisan solution, but this is not a battle we can win alone.

¹ See Kelefa Sanneh, *Untangling the Immigration Debate*, THE NEW YORKER (OCT. 31, 2016), <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/10/31/untangling-the-immigration-debate>.

² See Paul Goldman & Mark J. Rozell, *Illegal Immigrants Could Elect Hillary*, POLITICO (Oct. 3, 2015), <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2015/10/illegal-immigrants-could-elect-hillary-clinton-213216>.

³ See *id.*

⁴ See The Associated Press, *The Face of U.S. Immigration Evolves*, TRIBLIVE (Oct. 11, 2016), <http://triblive.com/usworld/nation/11293305-74/immigrants-america-immigration>.

⁵ See *id.*

⁶ See *id.*

⁷ See D'vera Cohn, *How U.S. Immigration Laws and Rules Have Changed through History*, PEW RESEARCH CENTER (Sept. 30, 2015), <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/09/30/how-u-s-immigration-laws-and-rules-have-changed-through-history/>.

⁸ See *id.*

⁹ See *id.*

¹⁰ See *id.*

¹¹ See Daniel Griswold, *Immigrants Have Enriched American Culture and Enhanced Our Influence in the World*, CATO INST. (Feb. 18, 2002), <http://www.cato.org/publications/commentary/immigrants-have-enriched-american-culture-enhanced-our-influence-world>.

¹² See *id.*

¹³ See *id.*

¹⁴ See *id.*

¹⁵ See Griswold, *supra* note 11.

¹⁶ See Gov. Martin O'Malley, *Finally, A Debate on Immigration Reform*, HUFFINGTON POST (Oct. 18, 2016), http://www.huffingtonpost.com/gov-martin-omalley/finally-a-debate-on-immig_b_12542652.html?

¹⁷ See *id.*

¹⁸ See Nathan Carpenter, *Clinton Proposes Comprehensive Immigration Reform*, THE OBERLIN REVIEW (Oct. 29, 2016), <http://oberlinreview.org/11469/opinions/clinton-proposes-comprehensive-immigration-reform/>.

¹⁹ See *id.*

²⁰ See *id.*

²¹ See George Borjas, *The Immigration Debate We Need*, N.Y. TIMES (Feb. 27, 2017),

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/27/opinion/the-immigration-debate-we-need.html?ref=collection%2Ftimestopic%2FImmigration%20and%20Emigration>.