

## Our Shadow Population (Part II)

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Last week we looked at information about the role of immigrants in the U.S. and on the East End. This week we hear from government officials, and from groups that welcome immigrants, or want them all to go away.

Witness For Peace (“a politically independent, grassroots organization”) advocates immigration reform that guarantees equal rights for all families, clear and non-discriminatory pathways to citizenship, children’s rights to education regardless of immigration status, and an end to collaboration between police and immigration enforcers which erodes immigrant trust in the police. Some years ago, the NY Civil Liberties Union said that numerous towns in Suffolk County were selectively using housing codes and traffic enforcement to target immigrants.

In September 2011, the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), after a two-year investigation, advised Suffolk County officials to improve police relations with immigrants. The investigation was prompted in part by the 2008 fatal stabbing in Patchogue of an Ecuadorian immigrant by local teenagers. The recommendations include outreach programs in Latino neighborhoods, investigation of possible hate crimes, and revision of procedures that discourage Latinos from interacting with police. The Suffolk police commissioner’s advisor on minority affairs said community meetings have been valuable in sharing information and gaining understanding of immigrants’ concerns.

For every “progressive” organization supporting immigrants, there’s probably a “conservative” group taking the opposite viewpoint. In a 2007 statement, the Heritage Foundation whose avowed purpose is to “formulate and promote conservative public policies” said we should not grant “amnesty” to illegal aliens. In 2007, the president of the Minuteman Civil Defense Corps stated, “...it is now more important than ever for citizens to rise to the occasion and fill a void in national security. Minuteman Civil Defense Corps volunteers...will now patrol the border with over 100 fully-armed citizens who consider themselves members of the unorganized state militia.”

As reported by Voice of America News, Ira Mehlman of Federation for American Immigration Reform wants Republican Congressmen to challenge the President on his August announcement that the administration’s deportation efforts now would focus on illegal immigrants with criminal records, or who pose a threat to national security, while outlining ways for those with no criminal record to remain in the U.S. and even apply for a work permit. And by the way, replenish our aging, diminishing work force and keep Social Security funds filled for retiring boomers.

Representative Lamar Smith of Texas this past spring introduced the “Keep Our Communities Safe Act of 2011” that according to the American Immigration Council (AIC) proposes a massive expansion of the immigrant lock-up system. The AIC says the bill reinforces the myth that immigrants are more likely to commit crime or pose a danger to society than native-born Americans, and stated further that the administration’s 2012 budget request for immigrant detention already totals over \$2-billion. Smith’s bill also requires businesses to screen for undocumented immigrants, but faces opposition from his own party and even Tea Party factions. Republican Dan Lungen of California said, “It would devastate agriculture” where an estimated 80 percent of workers are undocumented.

Here in our own backyard, we asked for comments from Congressman Tim Bishop and Randy Altschuler, his most likely challenger in 2012. Bishop says the status quo is unacceptable. He supports comprehensive immigration reform that will gain control of our borders, regulate the flow of workers into the U.S. to fill our work force, and deal in an enforceable manner with immigrants who are in our country illegally. Bishop also supports the Federal Dream Act that would open a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants who “meet certain criteria” which are quite daunting.

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Altschuler states on his website that “we must secure our borders and stop rewarding illegal immigration. We can’t continue to look the other way when companies hire illegal aliens at the expense of unemployed people living here legally and looking for work. Altschuler supports increasing the number of Customs and Border Control agents, giving states the flexibility to address out-of-control illegal immigration that adversely impacts crime rates and local economics, no bail for illegal migrants or in-state college tuition breaks for illegal migrants.”

Fred Thiele, our representative in the NY State Assembly, said he “co-sponsored legislation which would establish a NY Dream Act to provide qualified undocumented immigrants with certain benefits, including access to State financial aid programs.” The bill restricts beneficiaries to “undocumented young adults who entered into the country before the age of 16 and have demonstrated a commitment to education, public service and good moral character.” Many other requirements must be met.

In 2009, the Immigration Policy Center issued a special report “Breaking Down the Problems: What’s Wrong With Our Immigration System.” It states that our immigration system remains frozen in time, locked into legal limits set in 1990 and restricted by laws passed in 1996. The report goes on to say that the problems are much larger than what to do about 11- to 12-million unauthorized immigrants living in the U.S., listing such crucial issues as — insufficient numbers of visas available to bring in high-skilled or less-skilled workers at levels needed to meet the changing needs of the U.S. economy and labor market, arbitrary visa caps that have created long backlogs of family members who must wait up to 20 years to be reunited with family living in the U.S., wage and workplace violations by unscrupulous employers who exploit immigrant workers and are undercutting honest businesses, and inadequate government infrastructure which delays integration of immigrants who want to become U.S. citizens.

The report further states that “the lack of a comprehensive Federal solution has created a range of lopsided, enforcement-only initiatives that have cost the country billions of dollars while doing little to impede the flow of unauthorized immigrants.”

The idea that immigrants would be legal if they would just “get in line” is unrealistic. There is no “line” for unauthorized immigrants.

The White House says regulating immigration is the job of the Federal Government, yet several states have passed their own laws, and the Supreme Court will review an Arizona statute. Immigration problems demand legislation that balances humane policies with the rule of law, and answers our nation’s economic and national security concerns. Last week the Obama administration made it a little easier for illegal immigrants who have an American spouse or parent to become legal residents, but unfortunately, comprehensive Federal reform probably will be gridlocked until after the election.

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