



BRUCE HEALEY

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IMMIGRATION

Last week, this paper published a letter from an area resident who reminded us to “stay vigilant” for illegal immigrants at Homerama. An area sheriff has taken it upon himself to battle illegal immigrants (which no doubt left the drug dealers, thieves and other criminals in his area delighted that his attention will be diverted to more “important” illegal activity).

As a person who waited seventeen years to come here legally, let me give you my perspective, as an outsider looking in.

Firstly, there is a misguided perception that all one has to do to get here legally is to sail into Ellis Island and answer a few questions. Not so. It is extremely difficult for most people to get a visa to come here as a tourist. You even have to produce your last local tax return to prove you have the means to return to your native country. To work here requires, for most people, willing employers, lawyers and patience. The days of Ellis Island are long gone, and understandably so - there must be controls on immigration.

Secondly, illegal immigration exists here because there are jobs here that we have come to expect others to do for us. To quote comedian Chris Tingle, if we had unionized American workers picking lettuce, salads would cost \$50 a pop. To try to cut out illegal immigrants from our society would be a shot in our economic foot, and the results - higher prices and skyrocketing salaries for menial jobs, resulting in high inflation - would be unacceptable for most Americans. Remember that the Federal Government has taken many years to raise the minimum wage. So many years, in fact, that some states, including Ohio, took it upon themselves to do it first. Keeping the minimum wage so low is tacit recognition that there are people out there that will do menial, hard

or difficult jobs for peanuts. They are just not, in general, American.

Finally, the distasteful and frankly, racist “immigrant bashing” that we are increasingly seeing in our area is un-American. This great country was founded on immigration and, unless you are a Native American, your ancestors came here as immigrants. They have been accepted and eventually assimilated. If the new immigrants looked like us, spoke like us, and acted like us, we would not be able to single them out and we would be far more tolerant. The fact that they are different makes them an easy target for unscrupulous politicians, misguided law enforcement and frustrated citizens seeking someone to blame for all the ills that afflict us.

Am I saying that illegal immigration is acceptable? Certainly not. We must encourage our elected officials to come up with policies that bring illegal immigrants out of the shadows, pay taxes and assimilate. (The looming crisis in Social Security could be at least attenuated if we got 12 million new people to pay their way). We must find a way to regulate the borders and the influx of unidentified individuals. These are difficult tasks, but this great nation has taken on bigger problems in the past, and resolved them with dignity and success. We cannot, however, continue to pretend we don't need this cheap labor, to pretend that we all are Native Americans, or to fantasize about the deportation of millions of hard working people. To do so would be to deny that the greatness of this land today came from the willingness of our forefathers to sacrifice everything to make a better future for our children. It is to admit that we have a problem that our society is incapable of solving. And that, my friends, is un-American, defeatist and narrow minded.