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■ Debate

Our view on immigration: Long waits, onerous rules invite immigrants to break law**Delays can last decades. And if you don't have connection, forget it.**

In 1989, Mohamad Abdo and his family, living in Lebanon, took their first step toward a dream of living in the USA. A relative, already here, petitioned for the family to join him.

Then they all waited. And waited and waited.

First came the inevitable delay caused by quotas that limit family immigration. Ten years passed before they even got permission to apply for visas.

Then the real frustrations started. For the next four years, they lived a paperwork nightmare as their application bounced around the immigration bureaucracy. In 2003, the Abdos finally were told they could come to the USA as permanent residents, with just one catch: Their eldest son, Raed, who was 8 years old when the process began, would have to stay behind. Because he had just turned 21, he no longer qualified to immigrate with them as a minor.

Welcome to the *legal* immigration system — a Byzantine world of bureaucratic bungling and unconscionable waits for those who try to play by the rules.

Unless you have a relative here, or a job waiting for you, or you're granted political asylum, there's virtually no legal way in. And if you do have a connection, [you'll probably wait for a long, long time](#). Some people have stood on line for more than 20 years.

Small wonder so many people just skip the process and enter the country illegally, or come here on temporary visas and then stay. For all the screaming about illegal immigration, now focused on a bill in the U.S. Senate, the truth is that legal immigration is so difficult that it gives normally law-abiding people potent incentives to cheat. No immigration reform will work unless that changes.

Of those who choose the legal route, by far the largest group is people such as the Abdos, who have relatives here. At the moment, the waiting list is more than 4 million people long, allocated by country.

The Senate compromise attempts to deal with this by promising to clear the backlog within eight years. Until then, no green cards would be given to people now here illegally.

That's not entirely fair. It's still a long wait, and in the interim, immigrants here illegally could get safe harbor while those seeking legal entry wait outside. But it's at least a start. The 12 million people here illegally aren't going to be rounded up and deported in any case.

The Senate could do better, though. The bill fails to address the nonsensical age-21 glitch leaving Abdo and his family in Memphis and his now-adult son in war-torn Lebanon.

More broadly, it does nothing to help legal residents bring their children and spouses here more

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quickly, which is heartless. Nuclear families should be able to stay together.

An even larger question is whether the glacial immigration system is capable of trimming the backlog. The money is supposed to come later.

As Congress tries to fix the immigration mess, it needs to remember that any system of legal immigration as onerous and time-consuming as the current one is doomed to undermine respect for the law and encourage even greater levels of illegal immigration. And that people such as the Abdos, who've followed the rules, deserve fair treatment and an opportunity to realize their dreams.

This is the fourth in an occasional series of editorials about this year's immigration debate. View the previous editorials at blogs.usatoday.com/oped/immigration_editorial.

Languishing in lines

Depending on their origin, spouses and minor children of legal U.S. residents, eligible this month for visas to become legal residents, have waited:

* Mexico — six years.

* Other — five years.

Siblings of U.S. citizens, eligible this month, have waited:

* Philippines — 22 years.

* Mexico — 13 years.

* Other — 11 years.

Source: *State Department Bureau of Consular Affairs*

Posted at 12:22 AM/ET, June 18, 2007 in Family - Editorial, Foreign policy general - Editorial, Immigration - Editorial, Law/Judiciary - Editorial, Lifestyle issues - Editorial, Politics, Government - Editorial, USA TODAY editorial | [Permalink](#)

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Mickey_Doodle1 wrote: 4d 22h ago

So, whats the big deal. Why do our citizens of today have to compromise in order to open our borders to anyone. Times have changed. It's time to worry about our own, but might be too late. I'm sick of this whole "illegal" immigration thing. Why don't we just encourage everyone inside our borders to break all our laws. If we have no one intelligent enough to write and talk about it, then don't print the stupidity.

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Alamo Joe wrote: 4d 20h ago

We are all so sick of this immigration scam, as soon as we thought it was all over for a little while, all of a sudden here it comes again right back in our face. It's been a big fight and now we have to fight again. The answer is "NO" to illegal aliens, Mexico is getting rid of their problems on us and if they pull off SCAMNESTY" and we don't close our borders and we don't deport the illegals then our country will be done, just stick a fork in it after that.

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Jimmyday wrote: 4d 18h ago

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Solution? STOP the welfare system NOW unless you are a legal citizen of the USA. Severe penalty for employer that hires an illegal.\$25,000 plus 1 year in jail per offense should do it. If there are no jobs or freebies,they will go back from where they came from.If these suggestions don't suit you,ENFORCE THE LAWS THAT WE HAVE NOW!! We don't need to have "new laws".

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To report corrections and clarifications, contact Reader Editor Brent Jones at 1 800 872 7073 or e-mail accuracy@usatoday.com. Please indicate whether you're responding to content online or in the newspaper.



knaug60 wrote: 4d 16h ago

My guess is that no one who responded so far has actually read the opinion and thought about it. What I'm seeing here is the usual "cut and paste". See an immigration piece, paste in the usual angry rhetoric.

- 1. Your "solutions" are the cause of the problem.
2. Illegals don't come here to get on welfare.
3. Illegals don't "clog" emergency rooms as much as you think. And they are not the reason my medical bills are skyrocketing. Hint: think old fat guys sitting on their duffs and getting diabetes.
4. The old "It's amnesty, it's amnesty" plaintive wail is sooo Chicken Little it's pathetic. You all don't scream when the government offers reductions in penalties aimed at you, like "tax amnesties" and the like. It's just hypocritical.

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Any submission to USA TODAY may be published or distributed in print, electronic or other forms.



Freefall wrote: 4d 15h ago

"the truth is that legal immigration is so difficult that it gives normally law-abiding people potent incentives to cheat."

Hmm So that makes it ok? It's hard to do it the right way so it is ok to break the law. I really want a boat, have wanted one for years but cant afford one. I take 50 dollars a month and put it in the "boat fund" mutual fund. To get the boat I want will take me another 8 years.. that's 2 after I retire.

SO that is my incentive to cheat. Does that make it ok? I want something that others have (money for my boat) and it is taking so long to get what I want (whine about my misfortune). So it is ok to break the rules to get what I want? If you say yes please provide a street address and have your savings in cash at the house.

knaug60 wrote:

- 1. Your "solutions" are the cause of the problem.
2. Illegals don't come here to get on welfare.
3. Illegals don't "clog" emergency rooms as much as you think. And they are not the reason my medical bills are skyrocketing. Hint: think old fat guys sitting on their duffs and getting diabetes.
4. The old "It's amnesty, it's amnesty" plaintive wail is sooo Chicken Little it's pathetic. You all don't scream when the government offers reductions in penalties aimed at you, like "tax amnesties" and the like. It's just hypocritical.

- 1) Hmm my solution is twofold.. tell them to leave and shoot the ones that don't. Give a 500\$ bounty on people killed crossing the border illegally. Issue resolved.
2) Well then.. making it so they CANT have it is not an issue than is it? Since according to you they don't want it. SO sure let them stay.. but no welfare, no ssi, no use of the schools.. no no no.
3) Depends on where you live. Some areas it is as bad as people as; others not.
4) Amnesty defined as saying it was ok for you to commit this felony.. so you get them to release EVERYONE in prison, drop all pending charges and give everyone a "free felony" card and I will support giving them one for theirs.. since mine will be used up to kill an illegal no harm no foul and everyone wins.

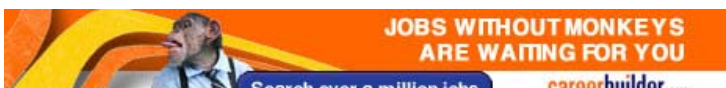
A crime is a crime is a crime. Yepp I said things intended to make you angry. I talked about breaking the law.. and that makes me a "bad evil person." Ironically the same people you are defending are all criminals... save your outrage for them.

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mick9m wrote: 4d 15h ago

Keep trying to muddle the issue with your irrelevant rhetoric until you get your way, mainstream media. The fact remains that illegal immigration costs us \$89 Billion per year, 9000 lives, higher crime, overcrowding. The government has a duty to protect the sovereignty of this nation.

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grm wrote: 4d 15h ago

I never understood how making someone pay over 5k\$ as a fine is amnesty, especially when you consider that some illegals don't even make that much money in 1 year.

This article shows an incredibly important point. There has to be a clear, well organized, efficient, LEGAL way to enter this country. If I waited 20 years to legally enter, only to be told that my children can't come with me... I think that's a lot of incentive to bring the children illegally.

The current regulations just don't make sense. It needs to be fixed. The first few posters here would just like to bury their heads in the sand, say no to all legal immigration and hope that the problem goes away.

Does everyone forget that this country was founded and built by immigrants? What makes people think they are so special just because their ancestors immigrated here 100 or 200 years ago?

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MrPisces wrote: 4d 15h ago

Mickey_Doodle1 wrote

"Why don't we just encourage everyone inside our borders to break all our laws. If we have no one intelligent enough to write and talk about it, then don't print the stupidity."

Americans already do that. If it weren't for individual Americans and American corporations, we wouldn't have the large immigration mess that we have today. We whine about amnesty for illegals but as hypocrites Americans aren't punishing those Americans that aided and abetted illegals by giving them jobs. Why only punish one group of criminals and not the other?

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MrPisces wrote: 4d 15h ago

Freefall wrote:

"1) Hmm my solution is twofold.. tell them to leave and shoot the ones that don't. Give a 500\$ bounty on people killed crossing the border illegally. Issue resolved.

A crime is a crime is a crime. Yepp I said things intended to make you angry. I talked about breaking the law.. and that makes me a "bad evil person." Ironically the same people you are defending are all criminals... save your outrage for them. "

My solution is better than your typical American KKK solution. Why just punish only half of the criminals? If it weren't for individual Americans and American corporations who aided and abetted illegals, we wouldn't have this huge immigration mess.

So, therefore, lets shoot ALL AMERICAN INDIVIDUALS from the American mom who hires an illegal to babysit her kids to the Joe Doe who hires one to mow his lawn.

Then lets shoot to kill all management employees from Walmart to the meat packers for continuously employing illegals for years and decades in their companies regardless if it is the mega-corporation or the small

mom&pop shop all for \$500 a "pop".

As YOU said, a crime is a crime. Ironically, the same people you are refusing to punish are also CRIMINALS.

TRUE IMMIGRATION ENFORCEMENT MEANS NO AMNESTY FOR THE ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS AND NO AMNESTY FOR THE AMERICANS THAT HIRED THEM.

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Bedford wrote: 4d 15h ago

I feel for the common person in Mexico. Our government supports the government there. In order to remain Americans and be able to help them our own middle class must survive. Jail the people that hire illegals, cut off the instant citizenship for new borns allegedly born on US soil, cut off the health care at taxpayer expense, cut off any kind of welfare to illegals. Stop building the stupid fence. I'm sure the wait is long, there is a good reason for that. Been here a long time? Pay up all the back taxes and social security, pay back the government for all the freebies come back when you are legal or go home and straighten it out there.

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