

# Talking about comprehensive immigration reform constructively

One side	Other side	A faithful response
<p><b>Open Borders</b> – on the one side are people who believe that U.S. borders should be open to anyone that wants to come.</p> <p>The concepts of nation states and closed borders are relatively new in history. They have had much more to do with protecting the rich from contact with the poor. By blocking the poor from access to jobs that could improve their lives, closed borders is a violation of a basic human right to work, and amounts to discrimination by national origin.</p> <p>In a global world, capital is free to move across borders with no restrictions. According to classical economic theory, in order to maintain economic growth, labor must also be free to cross borders. Labor as well as jobs should be controlled only by supply and demand.</p> <p>Since global migration for moving jobs is now a fact of life, nations should recognize this and allow people to cross borders without impediment. National attempts to block that natural movement only makes what workers must do both more difficult and more dangerous. Note, for example the rising number of deaths in the Sonoran Desert, as people are forced by desperation to attempt the crossing in order to survive.</p> <p>As the global number of workers continues to increase, so will the costs for patrolling borders in a faulted attempt to close them. This money could be better spent in more helpful projects like</p>	<p><b>Closed borders</b> – on the other side are people that believe that U.S. borders should be closed to all immigrants.</p> <p>The purpose of borders is to protect the citizens of a nation from outside forces that would harm them, or that would dilute the strength of that nation. Therefore, open borders are a threat to national security and public safety. They allow drug and weapons smugglers as well as terrorists easy access to do citizens harm.</p> <p>Open borders would also trigger mass migrations to nations like the U.S. by poor people that would end up on welfare rolls, fill up emergency rooms, and make excessive demands on public services and education. Open borders are unnecessary for nations like ours that already has an effective process for providing visas for workers. Our current system also requires that immigrants become self-supporting or have a sponsor, so that they do not become a burden to current taxpayers.</p> <p>Nations likes ours are based on principles like hard work, self-sufficiency, entrepreneurship, open markets, and representative democracy. Open borders would allow large numbers to enter that did not share those principles. Over time they would water down the American experiment and weaken our economic prominence in the world.</p> <p>We are also a nation of people that limit our population, creating wealth to share among all. Opening our borders to people with no sense of birth control would mean creating a large</p>	<p><b>Secure borders, but with more visas for needed immigrant workers</b> – Nations have the right and responsibility to control their borders. Laws like our Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952, as amended in 1965, by the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, by the Illegal Immigration and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996, and by the Patriot Act of 2001 attempt to provide a consistent policy framework for dealing with the broader questions of immigration and national security.</p> <p>Over the past thirty years, the combination of our natural population growth and our visa system has not been able to come close to keeping up with the new jobs created naturally by our economy.</p> <p>Initially, employers began to recruit in countries like Mexico, assuring people that if they could get to the U.S., jobs were waiting. The early years of recruiting have given way to an informal network between south and north that lets people from the south know right away where jobs are opening and where they are closing in the north.</p> <p>Illegal immigrant worker helped fuel the growth of our economy throughout the last three decades. As they filled labor-intensive, demeaning jobs, this allowed U.S. citizens to move up the employment ladder.</p> <p>A combination of both a secure border and a system of visas that rises and falls with the needs of our economy is the right combination to begin to affect the illegal flow of people from south to north. When jobs do not go unfilled, the message will get back</p>

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<p>helping strengthen the economies of Mexico and Central America.</p> <p>Opening our border would create heavy migration for a while, but only until people discovered that there are no more jobs in the U.S. In addition, the dropping birth rate in Mexico will mean a disappearance of the need to emigrate from Mexico within twenty years.</p>	<p>population that current citizens would have to support through welfare programs. We should not be punished as a nation for the very things that have made us wealthy as a nation.</p>	<p>through the informal pipelines and illegal migration will begin to dry up as it has in the recent recession.</p> <p>Therefore, a more faithful response would be to embrace the importance of protecting our borders, while also recognizing that we can change our laws so that immigration meets our economic needs and over time will make border enforcement more manageable. We do not want to abuse many people who have come to help us. Neither do we want to allow people in that would come here to harm us.</p>
<p><b>Immigrants are a drain on our economy –</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The immigration cost to Arizona is \$1.4 billion per year</b> (\$140 million in health care, \$89 million in law enforcement, and \$540 million in English Language Learning programs)</li> <li>• Mexican immigrants in Arizona send home to Mexico annual <b>remittances of \$490 million.</b></li> <li>• <b>Mexico receives \$3.73 billion</b> each year from commerce and tourism with Arizona.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Immigrants are an asset to our economy –</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Families in Arizona with at least one Mexican immigrant in the household pay \$2.4 billion in taxes each year.</b></li> <li>• In 2004, about \$29 billion, or 8% of the total economic output was attributable to non-citizen immigrant workers.</li> <li>• Immigrants in Arizona <b>spend \$4.4 billion each year within the state.</b></li> <li>• <b>Arizona receives \$6.3 billion</b> each year from Mexico from commerce, tourism, and investments.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Both are accurate –</b></p> <p>These figures all come for the same study by Dr. Judith Gans of the University of Arizona’s Udall Center for Studies in Public Policy, <i>Immigrants in Arizona: Fiscal and Economic Impacts</i>. Dr. Gans regularly provides studies used by the Arizona Legislature. Similar figures could be prepared for Nevada, California and other states as well.</p> <p>A serious problem in the popular political debate is that both sides tend to emphasize only the figures that help their own argument.</p> <p>We must begin our conversation by acknowledging that there are both pluses and minuses resulting from the presence of immigrants in the U.S. Furthermore, erasing one side of the balance sheet means erasing the other as well.</p> <p>In the end, this type of argument doesn’t provide a true advantage for either side of the argument. Therefore, it may not be as helpful to a comprehensive solution as we often think it is.</p> <p>A faithful response is to not get caught up in rhetoric from either side that gives only half of the story.</p>

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<p><b>Provide amnesty for all illegal immigrants</b> – people on the one side say that most people that have come to the U.S. over the years to look for work have filled jobs that help the U.S. economy continue to grow and expand. If they had not been here to fill those jobs, economic growth may have slowed or halted. The U.S. population has now begun to decline slightly, but we create about 500,000 new jobs a year when we are not in a recession pattern.</p> <p>By not allowing them to come from the shadows, we are, in fact, agreeing to take advantage of their labor, making them second-class members of our society.</p> <p>Candidate Ronald Reagan said as much himself in a televised debate with Democratic presidential nominee Walter Mondale in 1984.</p> <p>"I believe in the idea of amnesty for those who have put down roots and lived here, even though sometime back they may have entered illegally," he said.</p> <p>It is time to recognize the contributions of these people and give them status, no strings attached.</p>	<p><b>Deport all illegal immigrants</b> – people on the other side say that an amnesty for illegal aliens forgives their act of illegal immigration and forgives other related illegal acts such as driving and working using false documents. The result of an amnesty is that large numbers of foreigners who illegally gained entry into the United States are rewarded with legal status for breaking the law. In January, 2004 President Bush Proposed an <i>earned legalization program</i> for illegal aliens. To this group, this is an amnesty under another name.</p> <p>Issuing an amnesty to illegal aliens only encourages more illegal immigration into the United States. After the 1986 amnesty, illegal immigration increased significantly. Census Bureau 2000 data indicate that 700,000 to 800,000 illegal aliens settle in the U.S. each year, with approximately 12 million illegal aliens now currently living in the United States.</p> <p>All those that have broken the law should be returned to their country of origin, where they can get in the back of the line like everyone else and wait for their chance at U.S. citizenship or a job here.</p>	<p><b>Create an earned pathway to legal status</b> – The term “amnesty” comes from the same Greek word as “amnesia.” It does not mean pardon, which would imply that someone had done something wrong. Amnesty simply treats a class of people that have broken a law as if nothing had ever happened. It is officially “forgotten.”</p> <p>By and large, this was the case following 1986 for 2.8 million illegal immigrants.</p> <p>In spite of what those on one side say, approving persons for U.S. immigration status only after they have been vetted and have paid for their infraction of the law is not amnesty.</p> <p>But on the other hand, such a process cannot be automatic (for example, “all people who have lived in the U.S. for five years”). Furthermore, the process should take time, so that candidates prove themselves.</p> <p>We must continue to allow our basic immigration processes to occur, even after reforms. They are our first line of defense against terrorists, smugglers, and violent people. We must be sure that each person we grant status is of high moral character, is productive, and will not try to harm us.</p>
<p><b>Illegal immigrants take American jobs and depress wages</b> – on the one side; some people argue that illegal immigrants take American jobs. When illegal immigrants come into an economy, their illegal status makes them ripe to be used by unscrupulous employers. This depresses wages in that occupation, usually to the point that American workers look elsewhere for higher wages. Without the presence of illegal immigrants among the workforce, owners would</p>	<p><b>Illegal immigrants take jobs that American workers no longer want</b> – on the other side; people say that two things are changing work patterns in the U.S. First, the American workforce is shrinking. Although this is not a problem during the recession, it will become a serious problem as the American economy rises from recession. Or worse yet, the lack of sufficient workers at the labor base of the economy could forestall a recovery. Without immigrant workers, over the</p>	<p><b>Both sides have part of the truth</b> – demographically speaking; in the coming three decades, the American workforce will depend more and more upon the children of current immigrant workers, as well as those workers themselves. Regardless of current policy decisions, this fact will not change.</p> <p>But we need a visa system that determines what jobs we can and cannot fill without hurting the position of</p>

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<p>be forced to raise wages to attract workers. Now that we are in a time of deep recession, many American workers would gladly take those jobs. The groups of American workers most affected by this problem are unskilled white workers and African American workers.</p>	<p>next 20 years the whole Baby Boomer generation will retire, leaving a gap in the American workforce that cannot be filled by our citizen population.</p> <p>Second, the American workforce is getting more educated, making them eligible for higher salaried technological, business, and commercial positions. Fewer and fewer would even consider a menial job now, regardless of the pay.</p>	<p>our current citizens – one that can rise and fall so that we can maintain economic momentum without hurting either American or immigrant workers. We also need a system that guarantees all workers the same rights, so that the market will force employers to compete on a level playing field.</p> <p>With such a workforce mechanism in place, without either over or undersupply of labor, wages would be forced in a stable, but fair direction for all laborers in America.</p> <p>As people of faith, we are concerned about those that markets wantonly use, including both immigrants and U.S. citizens.</p>
<p><b>Christians answer to a higher law</b> – the one side stresses first the desperation of those that have entered America just to find work in order to survive or to help their families back home to survive. Sure, there are some “bad apples” that smuggle, form gangs, and are violent. This is an issue of human nature; but it happens at a lower percentage among immigrants than it does among U.S. citizens.</p> <p>Immigrants come here because they have no other choice. They live in the shadows – poverty – and are oppressed by unscrupulous landlords and employers. This kind of oppression should not be allowed to go on anywhere. In the Bible, when the oppressed cry out to God, God hears them and responds to their need.</p> <p>Therefore Christians should follow God’s law first; and that law tells them to include and take care of strangers, not oppress them.</p>	<p><b>Illegal immigrants have broken the law</b> – the other side stresses first the illegality of undocumented workers, both those that crossed a border without authorization and those that overstayed their original visa. This is a serious infraction, and should carry the status of a crime, because many of those that enter this way today end up being a drag on the American economy. Many of them also, in turn, secure false papers, adding to the nature of the crime.</p> <p>Some people go farther and say that they are criminals, and that many of them are involved in drug, arms, and people smuggling. Many of them either bring gangs, or their children join gangs that destroy our cities. In addition, by breaking the law in such large numbers, they make it almost impossible for authorities to stop terrorists from entering our country.</p>	<p><b>Both are true but not mutually exclusive</b> – as the church, we have always tried to live by both the standards of our faith <b>and</b> the laws of our homeland.</p> <p>We are fortunate to live in a land that often changes its laws to make them fairer to all as situations change. Past immigration reforms have changed our laws in an attempt to do this because both citizens and immigrants were being hurt.</p> <p>At the same time, we must also remember that being a good citizen is not always the same thing as being a Christian. Moments of conflict can come in which we are called to be faithful to God first. This does not mean that we are advocating lawlessness. Instead we sometimes point to places where the law itself does not function as God would want, even though we submit ourselves to that law.</p> <p>But let’s be clear. One of the problems of each of these positions is that it looks mainly at the law and not at the people involved. One side does not see the sufferings and fears of the immigrant. The other can’t see the sufferings and fears of fellow citizens.</p>

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		<p>Both groups need to be seen as real people that are affected negatively by the lack of a well-functioning immigration system.</p> <p>As people of faith we recognize that there is a balance in a just society between right laws and right relationships between peoples, both of which are in constant change. We must look to that balance for true solutions for immigration reform.</p>
<p><b>Obey the government – Romans 13 -</b>  Along the same line with the previous section, one side within the church gives primary importance to Romans 13, which urges Christians to obey the government, since it was put in place by God for the purpose of maintaining order. This group also points out that the Bible is silent on the question of illegal immigration, which is different than a foreigner traveling through the land.</p> <p>This side points out that there are no instances in the Bible of people crossing borders illegally.</p>	<p><b>Love the stranger – (Leviticus 19: 33-34) –</b>  According to the other side, the treatment of strangers is one of the things throughout the Old Testament that separates the People of God from all other nations. The key legal passage to their argument is found in Leviticus 19, but they point to the equal treatment of strangers throughout the Bible as evidence.</p> <p>In addition, this side points to the story of Abraham and the three strangers that turn out to be God. From this story a series of incidents in both testaments point to the fact that God often comes to us in the guise of a stranger.</p>	<p><b>Both are true, but both begin and end with the law</b> – the problem with both sides of this argument is that they depend heavily upon the application of law, leaving little room of our understanding of the gospel.</p> <p>In Leviticus and throughout the New Testament laws, treatment of the stranger, along with the widow and the orphan, becomes the test case for whether or not a nation and its laws are following God. But it is not that simple in the Old Testament. The immigrants must live within limitations, being able to participate in the culture and the society at some levels but not at others.</p> <p>In Romans 13, Paul urges the Christians in Rome to obey the laws of the land, so as not to get arrested for the wrong reason. Paul does not want the gospel message to become tainted by rumors that the church is nothing but a bunch of immoral lawbreakers. This is because they, including Paul himself, already are being arrested just for being Christians.</p> <p>In general, we are called to be law abiding citizens; but situations can occur in which we simply, as Christians, cannot follow unjust laws. The clearest cases of this kind of choice in American history were the Anti-slavery Movement and the Civil Rights Movement, but even then the choices were difficult</p>

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		<p>and divisive to the church.</p> <p>But from the earliest Christian tradition the martyrologies, when it became impossible to be a Christian and follow a law of the land, it was not done with fanfare, but in quiet conviction and willingness to suffer the punishment of the law as a witness to the faith, once they were caught.</p> <p>This kind of decision is difficult to understand in our current context. It is based on a lot of things, but determining which law to follow in extreme situations must be grounded in our understanding of the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus; and it must be based on relationships– not on a partisan legal political posture.</p>
<p><b>First World policies create many of the problems that spur migration. Therefore, first world countries have a responsibility</b> – on the one side, people observe that many who end up immigrating to the U.S. come here from countries whose economies or situations have been negatively influenced by decisions of U.S. foreign policy, both trade and military. Therefore, they say that the U.S. government should bear some responsibility for addressing the problems it has helped create.</p> <p>We have consistently received asylees from countries in which we have been at war. We need also look at many immigrants as economic asylees of our trade policies.</p>	<p><b>The fate of immigrants is ultimately the responsibility of their home country</b> - on the other side; people sympathize with the plight of immigrants in the U.S., but say that the U.S. cannot accept all the problems of the world. The governments of the nations that send migrants to the U.S. are ultimately responsible for providing for the care and welfare of their citizens.</p> <p>If the U.S. continues to accept all who migrate from those countries, there will be no incentive for the sending countries to solve their own employment and other social problems.</p> <p>In the end, by letting more and more people come in, the cost for their coming is shifted to the U.S. tax payer.</p>	<p><b>We live in a global society in which problems are interconnected</b> – We live in a world in which migration has remained constant over the years at about 3% of global population. Of course, as the population has exploded, so have the numbers of migrants. In general, people from poorer countries migrate to richer countries than their own. This does not necessarily mean that receiving countries have the resources to receive large numbers of immigrants.</p> <p>The U.S. is the main immigrant receiving country in the world. But our economy is also finite, as is our ability to absorb immigrants. We must be careful that we understand our receiving capacity in percentages rather than raw numbers. For example, although there are a large number of immigrants living in the U.S. today, the percentage of our population today that is foreign born is actually less than it was in 1910. So though the numbers are high, we have managed this kind of situation before as a nation. Our ability to receive immigrants should depend</p>

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		<p>upon the health of our economy and our ability to absorb them as productive residents and citizens.</p> <p>Regarding sending and receiving nations, we need to better understand the plight of most immigrants. According to the Roman Catholic Church, people across the world have the right to migrate in order to survive. Although our church has not affirmed this tenet, we do need to think more as a global church; and we need to increase our understanding of how we can grow as a nation without impoverishing other nations, causing their citizens to emigrate to survive.</p>