

View: Trump's Immigration - Destruction, not disruption

Synopsis

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By **Rajiv Khanna**

US immigration is presently going through policy changes that have proven to be more deleterious for business and individuals than any wrought by a government in the past three decades. Trump won the US presidency largely by fanning the notions that the USA needed to be put first (“Make America Great Again!”) and partly by vilifying immigrants (“Build the Wall!”). Unfortunately, the cacophony of the chants has drowned conscientious deliberation that should be the foundation of all policy formulation.

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What started as a momentum to keep out illegal immigration, became a series of blows against legal immigration. We observed with concern ill-considered changes in policy towards all legal immigration, a case in point of which is investment-based immigration (EB-5 visas). Trump nearly doubled the required investment amounts. Proponents correctly argue that the EB-5 program has garnered more than \$20 billion in investments and has created more than 730,000 jobs between 2008 and 2015. How can any government oppose such a beneficent tool?

Similar and far greater and sudden attacks have been made upon H-1B visas for workers, student visas, work rules for students, immigration for parents of US citizens (decried as a part of “chain migration”). At one point, thousands of spouses and children were separated from and stranded in India for months. Life for immigrants has been made difficult as part of concerted immigration policy to block legal immigration.

What aided the presidency in often cataclysmic, overnight changes in policy was the discretion afforded to it by the laws. What restrained them were the Democrat controlled House Of Representatives and the courts, who all across the US overturned illegal policy formulation, time and time again.

As a recent example, the US Department of Labor with barely a week's notice has raised the required wage rates of H-1B workers by almost forty percent. This has sent shockwaves through the entire business and professional community. While this action is on its way to be challenged in the courts, human lives and businesses are left to contend with the uncertainty. It is the uncertainty that has been more harmful than the assaults themselves.

The bases of all sentiment against legal immigration lie either in the lack of understating of, or in an agenda-based willful blindness towards the pivotal role of immigration — the fuel that is needed to power a nation with its dwindling workforce of aging US population. The US Census Bureau has noted: “within just a couple of decades, older people are projected to outnumber children for the first time in US history.” “The number of Americans ages 65 and older will more than double over the next 40 years, reaching 80 million in 2040. The number of adults ages 85 and older...will nearly quadruple between 2000 and 2040.”- The Urban Institute.

Trump's constituency, approximately thirty percent of US citizens have not been shown the benefits of immigration, many of which the Trump challenger Joe Biden has pointed out in his immigration agenda. While a part of the Trump constituency is fanatically white supremacist, many are merely being directed to vent all frustrations brought about by the loss of jobs in manufacturing, coal, and industries where automation has replaced manual work. Joe Biden has promised a reversal of all of Trump's pot shots at immigration, and reform based upon careful thought, not misplaced emotion.

The perception amongst many, even in some of the Indian diaspora in the USA, is that H-1B workers (and by osmosis other workers as well) are impossible to compete with. One of the Indian parents commented to me that he had told his son, “do not think you can make a career in technology. You will not be able to compete with an Indian worker who is willing to work for lesser wages and would not insist on partying every weekend!” This imputation of mindless diligence is as misplaced as that the H-1B workers are uniformly paid less than the US workers. Most are not. Further, programs such as EB-5 that have been a proven tool for economic good need to be and can be easily restored by a different administration.

There is no doubt that a bipartisan study of issues and solutions should have been the precursor to permanent change. Misplaced emotion is not a tool for shaping policy. Biden has promised rational changes after he reverses the Trump upheaval, the Trump destruction disguised as disruption.

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