

The Cruel And Intolerant Myth of Attrition: Why The Huckabee-Krikorian Scheme To Starve 20,000,000 Undocumented Economic Refugees Out Of The Country Is Inhumane, Fiscally Irresponsible, And Undermines American Values

by Robert Gittelson

In an attempt to be charitable, I'm going to say that the Republican Party, in a desperate effort to retain at least some of their former political power, has latched onto the illegal immigration issue with both hands and their teeth, hoping that they can somehow ignite the smoldering embers of racial disharmony into an inferno of anti-Latino divisiveness that they have calculated should propel them to victory in next November's elections. They are playing high stakes political poker with their jobs, and they are definitely "all in" on this hand.

In the Presidential race, the Republicans are behaving like a pack of rabid wolves, each trying to out flank and attack the others by moving further and further to the right on the immigration issue. However, the most recent salvo, in the form of "A 9-Point Strategy for Immigration Enforcement and Border Security," was fired off by Governor Mike Huckabee, and it came as something of a surprise. I only say that because he propelled himself into the lead based largely on his performance in a recent debate, in which he appeared to be the most thoughtful and moderate of the Republican candidates on immigration. When attacked by Mitt Romney on his record of advocating in-state college tuition for high achieving children of illegal immigrant parents, he retorted with the comment, "In all due respect, we're a better country than to punish children for what their parents did."

The line was roundly applauded, the pundits thought that the line won him the debate, and in large part due to his appearing genuine and decent, he immediately jumped into the lead in the Republican race. One would have thought that he would have understood that his more moderate approach had resonated with voters. But, alas, he most certainly did not.

In response to continued attacks by Romney, Guiliani, et al., accusing Huckabee of being soft on immigration, he caved. Just the other day, he reached deeply into the Right Wing playbook, and pulled out a real hum-dinger. He actually modeled his anti-illegal immigrant proposal on a memo by Mark Krikorian, the Executive director of the infamously uber-right wing Center for Immigration Studies. The memo, "Re: Immigration: Ten Points for a Successful Presidential Candidate," (National Review, May 23, 2005), is where Krikorian cooked up his "Attrition is the Real Alternative to Amnesty" scheme.

In a nutshell, the scheme alleges that if you completely secure the border, and then completely enforce employer laws to make it impossible for businesses to employ anyone who doesn't have legal papers, then the illegal immigrants won't be able to work, so they will all self deport.

Well, that sounds simple enough. Heck, we won't even have to pay the costs involved with rounding up 20,000,000 people and deporting them. Problem solved, right? Wrong. It might be the single worst idea since New Coke.

The problem with political solutions that pander to a specific constituency group, as this scheme does to the fringe right, is that by definition the panderer ignores the pragmatic and practical elements that are needed to make a policy sound. Specifically, this "9-Point Plan" has 6 good points. It also has 2 partially good points. Unfortunately, it has 1 killer point that is so untenable, it delegates the entire plan to the circular file of shame.

The Devil is in the details. For example, his first point is to Build the Fence. I couldn't agree more. It surprises people when I explain my position on the fence, because the Right Wing Republicans have conditioned the public to assume that anyone who wants a comprehensive solution to immigration reform is for "open borders". I've been advocating reform for some time now, and frankly I've only come across one person that is for open borders. In contrast, I feel that it is fundamental to any country's immigration policy to be able to regulate who enters their country. You can't have an effective immigration policy without secure borders. I say build the fence, and build it high, dig it's foundations deep, and extend it out into the ocean.

His second point is to Increase Border Patrol. That makes sense too. I don't know how many more agents will be required, but hire as many as it takes to secure the border. He adds a curious and disconcerting caveat when he suggests that we "Fully support all law enforcement personnel tasked with enforcing immigration law," because vague and generalized statements like that can lead to abuse, but I'll give them the benefit of the doubt, and assume that they aren't suggesting that we "waterboard" illegal aliens until they rat out their illegal friends.

However, he loses all credibility for his scheme with his point number three, Prevent Amnesty. His two bullet points are as follows: A) Policies that promote or tolerate amnesty will be rejected, and B) Propose to provide all illegal immigrants a 120-day window to register with (immigration) and leave the country. Those who register and return to their home country will face no penalty if they later apply to immigrate or visit; those who do not return home will be, when caught, barred from future reentry for a period of 10 years.

Because he flatly rejects any compromise solution that would allow our current workforce to remain intact and functional, he proves that he simply doesn't understand the fundamental principals governing our domestic economy, and our tenuous grasp on global fiscal policy as it relates to our ability to compete in the World marketplace. Let's start with the devastating ripple effects that will reverberate throughout our economy if we were foolhardy enough to implement this scheme. At home, we would have massive work shortages in many sectors of our economy, ie:

1. Agriculture - since some 30% by most counts of our farm labor is illegal, and we are still understaffed on most farms already, we would be faced with an extreme crisis in our food supply. We would see massive price increases due to the lower

supply of available food products. We would see a major reduction in our exports, (which would hurt our already bleeding trade deficit - causing further weakening of the dollar, since agricultural products are our number one export category).

A case in point would be Colorado, which bills itself as the most anti-illegal immigrant state in the country, and is represented in the House of Representatives by Presidential candidate Tom Tancredo, who has been an outspoken advocate for harsh laws aimed against undocumented laborers. Colorado has passed some of the toughest anti-illegal immigrant state legislation in the nation, and has suffered immeasurably for it. The agricultural workers, both legal and illegal, fled the state because of the ill-conceived anti immigrant laws, and as a result, Colorado's farmers have suffered. This spring their crops were left rotting in their fields, and the state's farmers have become so desperate that they have resorted to using prisoners to tend their fields. The state has also suffered labor shortages in construction, and other business's such as carwashes are struggling to stay open without a sufficient supply of available labor.

2. We would see a crippling labor shortage in our domestic manufacturing, as many factories are dependant on long time undocumented employees, who are fundamental to our domestic manufacturer's ability to be competitive with imports on pricing, as well as in production capacity. This would be especially troubling to our overall economy, because manufacturing jobs, which have already been drastically reduced through outsourcing to countries that do have an available supply of low cost labor, are vital to the health of our overall economy due to the "multiplicative" effect of manufacturing jobs on our economy. Without going into a lengthy explanation of what that means, in simple terms, a new manufacturing job leads to the creation of 3-5 additional jobs in our economy. This is because when you manufacture a product, you need to buy the components needed to assemble that product, the electricity needed to produce the product, the packaging of the product, the shipping, accounting, managerial support, etc., etc.. Service sector jobs, in contrast to manufacturing jobs, usually only lead to the creation of at most 1 additional job, so you can see the value of manufacturing jobs on an economy. If we were to lose manufacturing jobs due to attrition or deportation, it would lead to the loss of many additional jobs throughout other sectors of the economy. The loss of several million manufacturing jobs would lead to a major slowdown in the economy. Again this hurts us as inflationary at home, and weakens our currency abroad.
3. The Travel & Leisure segment of our economy, one of our leading revenue sources, would be severely crippled in terms of our food service and hospitality. Restaurants and hotels would be extremely understaffed, causing less availability and higher costs when service was available. In many cases, the unavailability of labor would force many food service businesses to close, which would contribute to the downward spiral of the overall economy. Less tourists and business travelers would be able to be accommodated, hurting many additional sectors of

our economy.

4. Etc., etc., etc. (The Domino Effect).

The bottom line is that we are already at full employment in this country, and that is including the undocumented workers. Our unemployment rate is, and has been for several quarters in a row, below 5%. That is virtual full employment. Anyone that is employable, and wants to work, can find a job, (or two), in today's economy. Many people, especially Krikorian, mistakenly think that our undocumented workers are suppressing domestic wages. It might seem that way, because some American worker's were, in fact, displaced by lower wage immigrants. However, in most of these cases, it was more a byproduct of market competitiveness than greed by employers that led to the replacement of workers. Without the lower costs provided by the immigrant workers, the companies wouldn't have been able to compete for any business, so it was a choice of using immigrant workers, or not having any work at all. It might surprise Krikorian to learn that a study by the Public Policy Institute of California found that immigrant workers have increased wages for American workers by an average of 4%, primarily because immigrants generally perform complimentary rather than competitive work.

His scheme's point number 4, Enforce the Law on Employers, would be fine, if it weren't for his point number 3, Prevent Amnesty. Make no mistake, he explains exactly what he is trying to accomplish, as his first bullet point here is, "Employment is the chief draw for most illegal immigrants and denying them jobs is the centerpiece of an attrition strategy."

He is advocating that by denying employment to illegal aliens, they will be forced to choose between starvation here, or starvation back in their home countries. This intolerant approach smacks of a Marie Antoinette - "Let them eat cake" philosophy. He is also advocating that we intentionally and willingly enter into a severe economic recession in order to cleanse ourselves of the plague of 20,000,000 economic refugees.

This "damn the torpedoes" pursuit of ridding us of our undocumented workforce regardless of the consequences, alarmingly doesn't pay any heed whatsoever to the question of how our returning of 20,000,000 people back to their home countries will effect those countries, as if we live in an isolated bubble here in the United States.

On the abroad side of the equation, we would see many third world countries, particularly in Latin America, that are already grappling with horrible unemployment and lack of subsistence, (which is why these 12,000,000 -20,000,000 economic refugees escaped here in the first place), become massively overburdened with all of these unemployed returning mouths to feed. They wouldn't be able to handle it well, which is an understatement.

How would this affect the already growing left wing socialist and communist movements in most of these countries, including Mexico on our southern border? It would bolster the Latin American shift to the left, to put it mildly. Many, if not all of the "right-wing" anti-immigration advocates would consider themselves anti-communist as well. It would alarm them to find out that their anti-immigration reform stance is pro-communist, in that

it would facilitate and bolster the growing communist and/or socialist movements that have been making huge progress in Latin America in recent years.

Communists have won important and disconcerting political headway in many Latin American countries, including Venezuela, Nicaragua, and most alarmingly Mexico, right on our southern border. Adding another 12-20 million unemployed, low skilled laborers to the already swollen unemployment ranks of Mexico and other Latin American countries would cause a groundswell of support for the leftist movements already causing so much unrest in Mexico recently.

The threat of communism should not be taken lightly. Already 10% of the able-bodied Mexican labor force has headed north into the United States to look for work, since little employment exists in Mexico to sustain them and/or their families. If, through attrition, these workers were to self-deport back to Mexico, it would of course add several million workers to the "end of the unemployment lines" in Mexico, while at the same time cutting off the financial flow of dollars from workers that had emigrated to the United States to earn money to support their Mexican families, which would cause severe unrest and economic hardship, and add major support to the growing socialist or communist movements. That is why it is so crucial that we help Mexico sustain their economy. After all, they are our neighbor, and our number six export trading partner. A huge influx of unemployed workers, together with a stoppage in remittances from all of those displaced workers sending funds into the Mexican economy, (their second largest revenue source after oil exports), would devastate their fragile economy. This would also embolden our leftist enemies such as Castro in Cuba, Chavez in Venezuela, and Ortega in Nicaragua to ferment additional unrest in Mexico, bringing the very real communist threat directly to our border.

Finally, and putting all practical arguments aside, lets get right to the heart of the matter. What does the "attrition" scheme really mean? It means that if we were successfully able to withhold any means of employment from the millions of undocumented workers here in the United States, they would be faced with few if any viable choices. If they were to stay here, they would starve themselves and their families, and would be left homeless due to their inability to pay rent. They would wander around looking for work for as long as they could hold out, and then, faced with no prospects for survival here in the U.S., would be forced to return, defeated, broke, angry, and with their tails between their legs back to their countries of origin, assuming that they could survive that difficult journey back, without any means to pay for it.

It's like condemning 20,000,000 hard working and God loving people to execution by a thousand small cuts. It is a slow and painful torture of humiliation, condemnation, loss of dignity, hunger, helplessness, homelessness, desperation, and finally submission. Is this the America that we want? Is this the America that we have become? Huckabee and Krikorian seem to think so. One minute, Huckabee is saying that, "we are a better country than that", and the next he is proposing a scheme that would make the American Indian Trail of Tears seem like a casual stroll. Better than who, Governor? North Korea? Saudi Arabia? Darfur? If America is a better country then to demonstrate intolerance and

inhumanity, (and we are), then show a little leadership by supporting a comprehensive immigration policy that can solve this problem in a compassionate and logical manner.

About The Author

Robert Gittelson has been a garment manufacturer in the Los Angeles area for over 25 years. His wife, Patricia Gittelson, is an immigration attorney with offices in Van Nuys and Oxnard, California. Robert also works closely with Patricia on the administrative side of her immigration practice. Throughout his career, Mr. Gittelson has developed practical, first hand experience in dealing with the immigration issues that are challenging our country today.