

La Prensa

The immigrant stories and economic impact

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'From Every End of This Earth' is a book of stories; of immigrant families that enrich the delicate fabric of U.S. economics, culture and diversity and its author Steven V. Roberts emphasized the importance of immigrants in this country.

From the gripping tale of a Mexican farm worker in California who mistakenly joined the U.S. army and ultimately became a doctor, to the success tale of local businessman Dr. Asis Banerjee, the book details the struggles of adjusting and surviving in the land of free. "Immigration is the most dramatic experiences of human life," said Roberts.

Sharing some of the most inspiring stories at the City Club of Cleveland on Feb. 26, 2010, Roberts said in the two hundred history of this country there have been spasms of anti-immigration sentiments that have targeted certain populations; "Right now it is against Hispanics and Muslims."

One commonality for all opponents of immigration is the notion the next generation will corrupt the character of this country, which is perfect. Roberts stressed it is simply not true. "They were wrong then, they are wrong now, and they will be wrong in the future," he said.

Roberts said as countries like China and India advance they are strategically attracting a commodity that the United States has held a monopoly on for many years—brainpower. While developing countries can produce and distribute products for a fraction of the cost, the U.S. has relied on innovative ideas to stay ahead of the curve. "Thirty percent of the patents filed by Microsoft are by foreign born," said Roberts and added this illustrates the U.S. economy and innovation relies heavily on the best from around the world.

He argued the U.S. immigration quotas, especially applied to high skilled workers that file for H-1B, are nonsensical as it discourages those who benefit from a U.S. education from contributing to the economy. "There are no barriers to ideas," said Roberts.

When asked about where the U.S. government should draw the line in closing immigration he said he is in favor of controlled immigration but family reunification is essential as immigrants flourish economically in connected communities. He pointed to the Korean tradition of extended families pooling money and annually letting each one family start a business. “You can’t do that if you don’t have family members here,” said Roberts.

He said the recent decades have seen a feminization of immigration trends where women are more prominent in the workforce that has more vacancies in service areas. He noted the health care industry as a prime example where minority foreign-born women dominate: “Take out foreign born women of color and the health system would collapse overnight.”

Roberts said Republicans, who consider anti-immigration attitudes to be the flagship of their party, must revise their historical facts and notice that the greatest reform in immigration laws happened under President Ronald Reagan. He added that while immigrants have a great impact on boosting the economy it would be naive to neglect sudden and large influx of non-English-speaking immigrants does strain education and health resources in certain areas around the country.

He said the largest factor for immigrants who fail to integrate and are successful in the United States are those who do not learn the language. The language deficiency is always overcome by the next generation, which he said also is six grade levels more educated than the first. He said the problem facing Latinos is their first generation was so undereducated that it will take an extra generation to overcome the education barriers. “But they will!” he said.

“I was fortunate and well educated and things went smoothly for me,” said Banerjie, who relocated to Ohio from India to attend Case Western Reserve University and has since left the city three times only to return again. He settled in Medina, OH and heads Ovation Polymers, which has satellite stations in India as well. Banerjie exudes passion for the Greater Cleveland area and said the city needs a makeover and confidence boost to retain its finest students and attract foreign investments. The cold weather he said is not a match for the warm people.

That confidence boost is being planned in the form of Cleveland International Welcome Center that will facilitate in attracting international economic opportunities, helping the works assimilate to the city, and provide crucial networking contacts.