

A Day Without Immigrants

By: Veronica Cool February 23, 2017



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Could we function as a country if immigrants decided to not show up to school or work? Well, it happened Feb. 16. That protest surfaced anonymously and gained momentum across the United States in light of the increasing crackdown on illegal immigration and raids from Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers.

Immigrants, both documented and undocumented, are very concerned about profiling, detention and deportations. And that anxiety greatly increased this week when federal officials announced new guidelines to implement President Donald Trump's executive order, guidelines that essentially target anyone who is undocumented.

I've stood in the middle of the debates, with many people questioning why we would protect "illegals." After all, they are committing a crime simply by being in the U.S. unlawfully.

Women could not vote. That was the law.

Slaves were property, and anyone aiding their escape was committing a crime. That was the law.

We, as a people, evolve and learn. The iPhone was just introduced 10 years ago. Twitter, too. We are evolving rapidly, and our laws and government need to keep pace. So, why can't these "illegals" just go back and wait their turn in line?

There's no line. There's no path for citizenship unless you marry a U.S. citizen, wait three years, apply for resident status and then wait, study and learn American civics and history, prove to have good character, pay a \$640 application fee and agree to be fingerprinted. Of course, you can be sponsored by your employers if they can prove that no American citizen can fill the job. Or you can escape from hell and seek asylum. Or you can be beaten tortured, raped and seek refugee status.

Yes, American citizens petition or sponsor immediate family members. As of April 2016 there are 4 million applications in the system, dating to 1992. That's a 25-year wait. Typically, immigrants overstay their visas and seek "under the table" employment. The Immigration Policy Institute says undocumented immigrants comprise about 5 percent of the entire U.S. civilian workforce, about 8 million people. They are employed predominantly

in farming (26 percent) and construction (about 15 percent). Mexicans represent about 28 percent of this group, followed by immigrants from China, Philippines, El Salvador, Vietnam, Cuba and Korea.

These 8 million people are employed by American businesses. These businesses are not following the rule of law, either, by hiring undocumented workers and often paying them under the table, not including benefits or not paying any taxes for them. There have been cases where immigrants have been mistreated, ranging from no overtime pay to below-market wages and indentured slavery. And the repercussions are minimal to these employers; the blame is placed solely on the shoulders of the undocumented worker who has the misfortune of needing the job.

The current administration and ICE have increased raids and deportations of undocumented criminals. I'm very much in support of removing criminals, especially violent criminals from my neighborhoods, towns and communities. The problem is the inclusion of immigrants without legal status in the category of "criminal." These are the same folks who support the American economy as blue-collar farm and construction workers.

The "A Day Without Immigrants" Protest was a campaign to raise awareness of the contributions immigrants make to our great nation, not just about legalizing 11 million people living in the shadows. I'm a naturalized citizen. I'm a business owner, paying taxes, creating jobs and I CAN BE DETAINED by any law enforcement officer for not having my passport on me.

Do you carry your passport or birth certificate on you to prove your citizenship? My contributions and those of my fellow immigrants are significant. And not just Latinos, but Asian and African immigrants. We have tremendous buying power; Hispanics alone spend over \$1.5 trillion dollars annually.

This is why businesses closed Feb. 16. Parents kept their kids home from school. Immigrants didn't make any purchases, including gas and eating out, to show their solidarity for immigrants who are intricately tied to the success of America. We have no line. There's no process. Employers seek and hire undocumented workers. The system is broken.

We need immigration reform that includes a path to citizenship so our economy can thrive while protecting people's basic human rights.

Although there were marches, including one through Patterson Park in Baltimore City, this protest was not as large due to lack of notice, but already, larger groups are planning more organized events.

Immigration is a very polarizing issue. I hear statements like. "They take our jobs and use our resources." The facts are that immigrants work jobs unwanted by Americans for pay that borders on servitude, and sometimes they pay taxes (with fake documents/Social Security numbers) that they will never be able to claim.

The issue is complicated and costly, and deporting millions of people would leave a tremendous void. The solution is creating a process that quickly vets and legalizes people so they may come out of the shadows.

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<http://thedailyrecord.com/2017/02/23/a-day-without-immigrants/>