

OPINION

How to do immigration reform right

Robert Robb
Arizona Republic
USA TODAY NETWORK

President Joe Biden wants to take a serious, early run at comprehensive immigration reform.

That's good.

Unfortunately, his initial proposal doesn't offer a sound starting point, substantively or politically.

Substantively, here's what should happen.

First, Congress should pass a standalone bill that provides permanent legal status for those known as "Dreamers," people brought here illegally while children.

The Obama administration established, by executive action, a program by which dreamers could have renewable, temporary status, including the ability to work and attend college. The Trump administration tried to repeal the program, known by the acronym DACA, also by executive action, but a questionable U.S. Supreme Court decision found procedural flaws in how it was done.

With Biden in the White House, the DACA program is not under any political threat. But it remains highly vulnerable to legal challenge. If the legality of the program gets to the existing Supreme Court, it is highly likely to be struck down.

These young adults deserve certainty and the ability to plan out their lives. Permanent legal status is the minimum that would give them that. That certainty shouldn't be held up for the resolution of other issues, such as immigration enforcement, a broader amnesty or a path to citizenship.

Beyond the DACA population, Biden proposes a general amnesty for those currently in the country illegally and a pathway to citizenship. I agree with that. It best balances all the considerations and equities involved.

It is true that these immigrants violated our laws to be here. That is no small thing and shouldn't be lightly dismissed by those advocating amnesty.

But they followed what was our de facto immigration policy for many years now. That policy was roughly as follows: We will try to nab you if you illegally cross the border. But if you make it into the interior and live a productive life, we'll leave you alone.

As a result, there are many illegal immigrants with settled lives in this country.

According to the Migration Policy Institute, there are around 280,000 undocumented immigrants residing in Arizona. Nearly 70% have lived in this country for longer than 10 years.

As a result of the de facto immigration policy, there are now millions of blended families in the country, with some members legally here and some not.

The institute estimates that there are more than 4 million children in the country who are citizens but have at least one parent illegally present.

Breaking up those families would be morally unfathomable.

However, to gain broader acceptance of an amnesty, and have immigration recede as a divisive political issue, there needs to be reason to believe that this will be the last amnesty. That from this point forward our immigration laws will be fully enforced and illegal immigration will become negligible.

The best, and probably only, way to achieve that is by an immediate, national requirement that businesses use the E-Verify system for all new hires. That is a federal program that electronically confirms legal eligibility to work in this country.

Contrary to claims by the business community, which wants to preserve an elastic supply of low-skilled workers, the current system works fine and is adequate without upgrades or improvements. The only way to defeat it is through identity theft, using the name and Social Security number of a real person.

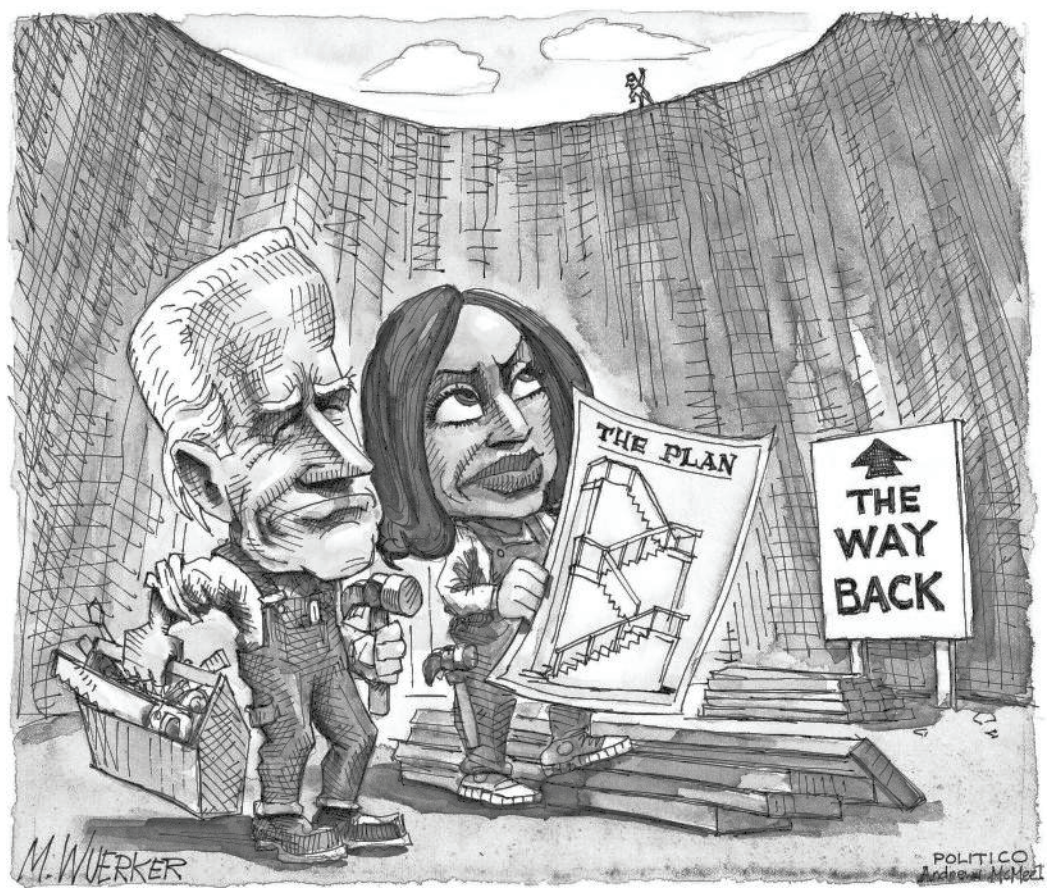
The mandatory use of E-Verify, and a commitment by the federal government to take identity theft to defeat the system seriously, would effectively lock illegal immigrants out of the formal U.S. economy. That would reduce illegal immigration to a trickle, even without other enforcement measures commonly invoked in these discussions.

This is where the Biden proposal gets off to a bad start, substantively and politically. The only workplace enforcement measure he suggests is a committee to study it. He has largely suspended current immigration enforcement. He doesn't seem to understand, or accept, the need to provide some reason to believe that this will be the last amnesty.

Getting comprehensive reform done politically in such a closely divided Congress will require a lot of give all around. Job one is to provide dreamers certainty and remove them from the mix, except for a path to citizenship.

If comprehensive immigration reform isn't to once again become the victim of partisan gridlock, job two is for Biden to send a strong signal of a commitment to make this the last amnesty, by expressing full-throated support for an immediate, universal E-Verify requirement.

Reach Robb at robert.rob@arizona-republic.com.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Understand the issues in South Kitsap schools

As I read the letters published in the Sun concerning the upcoming levy, there is obviously a lack of understanding of what the issues are. There is no one on the planet that does not support education and the best for their kids. There will never be enough money from the state or any levy to fill the wish list of any district.

One side thinks that anyone who doesn't support the levy is anti-education and anti-kids. They feel that any expenditure of the district should not be questioned. Sadly, there are many districts that justify every expenditure as "for the kids." Levies are required to provide what the state fails to fund.

The other side feels that the district does not spend taxpayer money as intended. They fully support education but want their money spent on items that relate to the education of their kids. They perceive the district in a "lifestyle creep." It is easy to justify wants into "needs." Ever increasing salaries and benefits using all state funds takes money away from student needs. Excess staff doesn't equal better education. Every idea and new program doesn't make education better. Other districts seem to afford band, choir, sports, etc., with smaller levy requests and better academic results.

Whichever way you vote, don't equate a "yes" vote as support kids and a "no" vote as anti-education. Rich people can easily afford rising taxes while others don't have the financial means for items that don't directly support student needs.

Jeff Daily,

Port Orchard, is a member of the South Kitsap School District board. His views are his own.

Group opposing nukes has every right to speak

In a recent letter to the Sun, Conrad Pyle criticized the editor for publishing public service announcements that oppose nuclear weapons. Ground Zero Center for Nonviolent Action, a grassroots organization of concerned citizens based in Poulsbo, has opposed the Trident Weapons System and all nuclear weapons for over 40 years. The purpose of the announcements is to raise the level of awareness among all citizens of Kitsap County to the clear and present danger that nuclear weapons pose to our community, our country and our planet.

The announcements are not insulting to the people at Bangor, nor do they minimize their sacrifices. Their stewardship over the last 40 years has resulted in an exceptional record. They are the best. We can honor our neighbors while opposing national security policy.

Prior to joining Ground Zero in 2003, I was a naval officer for 32 years. I served in ballistic missile and attack submarines, and commanded an attack submarine during the cold war. I understand the destructive power of nuclear weapons and the potential for the failure of deterrence. In the United States citizens have the right to express nonviolent opposition to our government's policies and newspapers have the right to print material that expresses dissent. Mr. Pyle implies that expressing opposition to government policy may be treasonous. Such accusations are a tool of repressive governments to silence legitimate political opposition. Not in my country.

I applaud the Sun for publishing Ground Zero's public service announcements.

Tom Rogers,
Poulsbo

Levy approval is the right direction for community

We want to thank the South Kitsap School board and administration for proposing a levy that will provide quality education for our students while, at the same time, demonstrating responsibility and respect toward our taxpayers.

As senior citizens on fixed income, we appreciate that this is not a new tax being piled on us; it is simply a renewal of the current tax rate. I like to believe that those of us who have enjoyed the benefits of receiving a quality education are willing to help provide youngsters in our community with the same advantages we were given. Every citizen benefits personally and economically when we help our youth build good personal and economic lives for themselves.

I urge South Kitsap voters of all ages to support this levy to ensure a vibrant future for our young families and a positive, enlightened direction for our community. Please, every one, fill in that "yes" box on your ballot and send it in between now and February 9. You'll be glad you did.

Thank you for your vote.

Tom and Sally Juvik,
Port Orchard

Biden's climate plan won't do much

I don't know where the current administration has their heads, but they think they can change the climate of the whole world just by piling more taxes on us overtaxed citizens. They could not even control the current pandemic, let alone think they can change the whole world climate.

Meanwhile, China is building coal fired power plants all over the world, which neutralizes anything we do. Unless we can get China and other countries on board, is just doing you know what, into the wind!

Jerome Hamling,
Silverdale

Don't ask teachers take this risk

Those who enter the field of education do so, hopefully, with considerable idealism but minimal illusions. They should expect low pay and long hours, overcrowded classrooms and constant feuding over the allocation of funds. These unfortunately, are normal and constant. One thing they should not have to expect, however, is to be asked to put their lives on the line. They are contracting to teach, they are not enlisting in the armed forces or volunteering to give their lives for their country or their communities.

But that is exactly what they are now being asked to do, to take a risk no one has the right to ask of them – not administrators, not school boards (thank you Mike Spence for being the one school board member to not ask that), not Jay Inslee or Joe Biden. Christina Hulet, though "comfortable" with the return to school, admitted that this is a "huge ask." Even with the word huge attached to it, this is a gross understatement. Asking teachers to teach virtually is a "huge ask." Asking them to risk their lives, as well as the health and safety of their families, is insanity.

Now that vaccines are at least somewhat available, no adult should be bullied into working in a school building until all have received vaccinations. This includes teachers, administrators and all classified staff. Saving lives should be our number one priority. It's still not too late to return to the more cautious approach that has worked so well for Washington state to date.

Jeremy Rothbaum,
Bainbridge Island

LETTERS POLICY

Letters should be 250 words or shorter, neatly typewritten. The Kitsap Sun reserves the right to reject, edit or condense all letters. Mass submissions are not accepted and writers are generally limited to one letter a month. All letters must include the writer's first name and (for our verification) address and daytime phone number.

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