

Remarks of Ross C. “Rocky” Anderson

Immigration Rally and March

Washington Square

Salt Lake City, Utah

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Our nation, and our state in particular, are facing a crisis.

It is a moral crisis -- a crisis fed by bigotry, injustice, and a lack of empathy for millions of our brothers and sisters who want the same things we all want -- to work, to provide for their families, and to live in peace.

It is also a political crisis -- a crisis of cowardice and opportunism. It is a crisis of utter failure by our elected officials to take the necessary actions to exercise compassion toward those who have worked hard, cared for their families, and contributed to our communities, while providing our nation with a workforce that drives much of our economy and our supply of food.

Our elected representatives – particularly our federal representatives – have provided abysmal leadership. And they have failed us – for the basest reasons – the same reasons that Senator Hatch first supported the DREAM Act then tucked his political tail and opposed it. These politicians have utterly failed our nation, year after year, as they have neglected to enact federal legislation that will help provide us with the workforce necessary for a strong economy, and to allow as many as 14 million people in our country to come out from the shadows and stop living in fear of devastating prosecution and deportation.

Notwithstanding the vast ignorance and mean-spirited, fact-free assumptions of many of the people in this country the crisis is not caused by undocumented immigrants and their families. Rather, the crisis is a product of those who selectively invoke the rule of law, when their obvious objective is to rescind the promise reflected by the Statue of Liberty's message of hope and freedom for immigrants coming to the United States:

Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me. I lift my lamp beside the golden door!

The message of the anti-immigrants is that the golden door should be slammed shut. "Stay out!" they scream. They point at hard-working immigrants and their families and blame our problems on them, while ignoring the true sources of our recession, the upheaval of our economy, and the unprecedented disparity in wealth and income in this nation. It is a small-minded nativist, xenophobic, supremacist message, counter to the grandest traditions of our nation – and counter to the higher morality that tells us, simply, that we should treat each other as we would want to be treated.

The surveys of people throughout the United States tell us so much about the misinformation driving the tremendous bigotry toward undocumented immigrants – the same sort of bigotry that was aimed in earlier times against Irish immigrants, Italian immigrants, Jewish immigrants, Japanese immigrants, and others.

Usually the majority of those responding to polls express unfounded fear concerning undocumented immigrants. The poll respondents think these immigrants will take jobs away from Americans, they think they'll end up on welfare, and they believe they are an economic drain on our states and our nation.

These are the reasons often proffered for the adamant opposition to allowing otherwise law-abiding people to work, care for their families, and live in peace. But the fact that those reasons are counter to the undisputable evidence gives rise to the conclusion that there is something else, something far more sinister, behind the almost hysteric hostility toward millions – perhaps as many as 14 million immigrants in the United States.

There is no crisis of rampant unemployment caused by people who have come to this nation to work and to make a better life for themselves and their families. Our nation's current unemployment and underemployment situation is a result of a recession and economic upheaval caused by greed and fraud by enormous investment and financial firms, by regulators and enforcement officials who have allowed all of it to happen, without any accountability by the perpetrators, and by the corruption and ineptitude of those who were elected to represent our interests but who instead have served the corrupt interests of their campaign contributors by de-regulating the financial industry. Let us all understand the true causes of our recent economic travails and take measures to correct our nation's course, rather than being diverted by the hostility and misinformation that has led to mindlessly scapegoating immigrants.

The research clearly reflects that, because immigrants are consumers, as well as workers, they create an enormous demand for investments, goods, and services, thereby creating more jobs. Other research has demonstrated that undocumented immigrants allow high-skilled workers to become more productive and increase their income. And it is obvious that there are not sufficient replacements for the undocumented immigrants who work on U.S. farms. The following was reported by the *Washington Post*:

Check out the asparagus you have for dinner, the cucumber in your salad and the pear on your plate for dessert. Chances are none would be there if not for the undocumented

farmworkers who plant and pick most of the fruit and vegetables grown in this country. Nonetheless, faced with a serious and growing shortage of legal agricultural labor, Congress has followed the same playbook it has used for the broader issue of illegal immigration: political cowardice and empty slogans followed by inaction.

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At least half, and possibly as many as 70 percent, of the 1.6 million farmworkers in America are undocumented immigrants . . . Reports in the past year of vegetables and fruit rotting in fields and orchards for lack of hands to harvest them have failed to give Congress sufficient impetus to act. Look for the labor shortages, and instances of rotting produce, to grow more acute next year.¹

That was written in the *Washington Post* over three years ago, yet politicians continue to posture and fail miserably in solving the real problems facing our nation. In the meantime, immigrants want to work, care for their families, and contribute to their communities.

This is not a crisis of an economic drain by undocumented immigrants. The claim that undocumented immigrants cost more in government services than they contribute to the economy is patently false.

Although undocumented immigrants are entitled to emergency medical care, subject to financial and category eligibility, and their children are entitled to elementary and secondary public education, they are barred from other government benefits, including food stamps, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Medicaid, federal housing programs, Supplemental Security Income, Unemployment Insurance, Social Security, Medicare, and the Earned Income Tax Credit.

Just consider: Undocumented immigrants contribute about \$3 billion annually in Social Security and unemployment insurance, yet they receive none of it back. On top of that, undocumented immigrants pay billions in federal, state and local taxes annually.

The bottom line, without question, is that undocumented immigrants pay far more into public coffers than they cost in public services.

We need the labor supply. Undocumented workers create more jobs. And they contribute more than they cost. So what is the problem?

About the best anti-immigrants can do when faced with the facts is lament that the law is being broken. They complain, "What part of illegal don't you understand?"

¹ "Rot in the Fields - As farmworkers become scarcer, Congress dithers," *The Washington Post*, Dec. 3, 2007.

First of all, it's tragic that they supposedly care so much about the rule of law when it has to do with people of different ethnic origins taking measures that will enable them to work and take care of their families – but they blindly support wholly illegal crimes against peace, which cost hundreds of thousands of lives and trillions of dollars from our nation's treasury, and war crimes, which are illegal under both international law and United States domestic law. Will they stand for the rule of law, and accountability for war criminals? Or, for anti-immigrants, are we to be concerned about the rule of law only in cases of people using false Social Security numbers so they can work and provide for their families?

When insisting on strict adherence to the rule of law, we must all put this situation in an honest historical perspective. We are not starting with a clean slate. Notwithstanding the simple-minded approach of the “what-part-of-illegal-don’t-you-understand” crowd, we are facing a very complex situation brought about by decades of government and corporate collusion that resulted in millions of people coming to our country without legal documentation, reasonably expecting that it was alright. It was the kind of collusion reflected by the “Help wanted” posters put up by U.S. companies on the south side of the Mexican-U.S. border – the type of collusion that equated to a wink and a nod to immigrants, letting them know they would be able to work in certain segments of our economy without any adverse repercussions to them and their families.

It is unjust and hypocritical to entice millions of people to come to our country to help build up our economy, enrich thousands of corporations, and have immigrants pay billions of dollars in taxes and Social Security, then, because of fear-mongering pundits, politicians, and misinformed members of the public, pull the rug out from those who have lived otherwise lawfully, worked hard, and been contributors to their families and communities.

Why did Ronald Reagan lead the way toward an amnesty for undocumented workers? Why did George W. Bush advocate a means for undocumented workers to stay in the U.S. and continue working? Because they knew of the advantages to U.S. businesses and to our economy from immigrants, documented and undocumented.

If we recognize how and why undocumented immigrants are in our nation, we can fashion legal reforms to permit those who have led otherwise law-abiding lives and their families to stay in the U.S. to work and contribute. We can also know exactly who is here, and prosecute or deport those who have otherwise violated our laws. These reforms, allowing all otherwise law-abiding immigrants to come out from the shadows without fear of prosecution and deportation, will vastly enhance our nation’s security, enabling us to know exactly who is here and who needs to leave.

We can also make certain that we have the labor force we need for all segments of our economy. With fewer and fewer people of working age to take care of retiring Baby Boomers, particularly to meet the skyrocketing demands of Social Security and Medicare, every Baby Boomer, and every younger person who will be carrying a heavier and heavier Social Security and Medicare load, should be urging more immigrants to join

the U.S. workforce in order to help meet the demand for more contributors into these retirement programs.

Our interests all merge at the point of a compassionate, reasoned approach to immigration reform, without hostility, without bigotry, and without the divisions that this issue is unnecessarily causing throughout our nation.

We are at a crossroads, where we can, as a society and as individuals, choose the path of meanness, contempt, and bigotry, or we can choose the high road of reason, opportunity, and compassion. Let us come together and do so much better as a nation of people who recognize the reality of how we got where we are today and who will seek justice and unity, rather than hostility and division, working toward solutions of which we can all be proud – as Americans, as immigrants or descendants of immigrants, and as men and women who embrace a higher morality and humanity.

Rejoicing in the grand opportunities we have before us, and exercising greater understanding, a more generous spirit, and a deeper compassion toward our brothers and sisters, it can be done!

Si se puede!