

President's Letter
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After two weeks of watching the political conventions, I find myself wondering which candidate would do the least harm to our agricultural industries. Dairy farmers and producers of labor intensive crops like fruits and vegetables will be hit very hard no matter which candidate prevails. I also worry about how other sectors of our economy will fare, especially as I glance at the accounts payable for our farm alone. Thousands of small businesses providing services, commodities, and equipment to producers could be adversely impacted by the actions of those who ultimately assume power.

Dairy farmers are constantly trying to adapt to the shrinking availability of willing workers. Replacing workers with automation innovations, such as rotary parlors, robotic udder preppers, pre and post dippers, automated weigh systems and cow sorters has been very expensive and very difficult to retrofit into older style barns. Robotic feeding requires extensive new construction and expense, currently not justifiable with the low prices being paid for raw milk. Until automation in the dairy industry becomes perfected, dairy owners will be forced to either find workers or get out of business.

Both candidates seem to be unaware of what is really happening on America's farms. Agricultural jobs have long been disdained by most citizen workers. Relatively few citizens, especially the currently unemployed, would make a voluntary choice to seek work on a farm to put food on their tables. The diminishing ranks of willing citizen workers are being replaced as the need arises, either by automation or by people from other countries who view these jobs as a great opportunity. From countries all over the world, immigrants have come to farms, food processing plants, slaughter houses, factories, oil fields, construction sites, restaurants and hotels. Some came here legally on a work visa. Some came on a tourist visa and never left. Some came here by sneaking across one of our borders. The point is that they are here now and they are willing to do jobs that Americans emphatically do not want. Further, they will do these jobs for a fair and decent wage that is roughly ten times what they could earn in their own country doing the exact same job. They do not see themselves as being abused by business owners. Most of them did not come here for citizenship.

I recently spoke with the son of a former H2A visa worker of ours. This young man had achieved his American citizenship status and was asking me why Americans were willing to shut down the economic engine of the world over the issue of illegal immigration. He said, "No Americans want these jobs! What is everyone's problem with someone else (legal or illegal) doing the work?"

Nowhere is the lack of understanding on the part of our elected officials more apparent than in the "Bipartisan Framework for Comprehensive Immigration Reform." This document, previously released by the "Gang of Eight," was an attempt to deal with the immigration crisis. In typical Washington style, the entire immigration system was slated for "comprehensive" change when only two problems needed to be addressed on an urgent basis. This document contained harsh language and proposed punishments for employers seeking to hire and for employees wanting to work.

This framework would have required "those who came or remained in the United States without OUR permission," to "register with the government" so that they could then submit themselves to a background check and "settle their debt to society" by paying fines and back taxes. The tone of this paragraph is authoritarian and threatening and shows a serious lack of understanding of human nature. Illegal immigrants are enjoying a status of more freedom and mobility than U.S. citizens and the legal immigrants who are already plugged into the system. They have nothing to lose by disregarding the edict. They are not going to voluntarily sign up for punishments.

In the paragraph dealing with employers, the Gang of eight stated, "Employers who knowingly hire unauthorized workers must face stiff fines and criminal penalties for egregious offenses." This approach cruelly backs employers into a corner and poses only two choices for them: Continue to try to maintain a staff of workers so that you can continue to produce and make a reasonable profit while simultaneously placing yourself in a position of extreme risk for raids, fines or incarceration, or...get out of business.

These problems could be easily solved and this could be done in a sensible and kind way that does not harm, hurt or punish anybody.

- ✓ Illegal immigrants currently residing in this country need to be notified by means of a non-intimidating bi-lingual ad campaign, on network and cable TV and on radio, of the fact that they need to acquire a worker visa card for each adult in their family. Worker visa cards should be easily available for a nominal fee and not associated with punishment or "back taxes." This card would contain mistake-proof identification parameters. Background

checks could be made to establish eligibility. It is unlikely that criminals would try to obtain a work visa card if this fact was made known. This card would allow the carrier to be entitled to live and work in this country legally during the dates specified on the card. The information on this card could be used to automatically deduct a worker visa tax, which would result in automatic tax collection at rates equal to taxes imposed upon citizens in payment of Social Security, Medicare, Unemployment, and Income taxes for appropriate brackets. A portion of taxes collected could be used to cover non work related medical care for workers on the visa system or their dependents. The card could be swiped by hospitals or clinics. The E-verify system already in place should be used to prevent non-citizens with no worker visa card from accessing taxpayer funded services. The system must be equal and fair to both American taxpayers and immigrant workers, not favoring or punishing either group with disparate rates.

- ✓ Punishing employers who, in desperation, might have had to resort to hiring the first available person who came along, would have disastrous effects on our economy. No employer willingly tries to hire illegal immigrants preferentially over American workers. If we continue to subsidize and reward “not working” and we fine and punish “working and entrepreneurship,” we will have made a bad situation much worse. No business owner should ever have to fear the government as a consequence of running a legitimate business and hiring employees. The only requirement that should reasonably be imposed upon employers would be that they swipe a worker visa card before they hire a new immigrant worker.

Implementing just these two common sense measures will yield impressive results. People will not be afraid to go to work. Employers will not fear the future and will invest more effort and more dollars in their businesses and this will create new jobs and opportunities for everybody. All of the jobs will finally get done each day and American farmers will remain the most efficient and productive in the world, ensuring an abundant supply of good food for all of us.