



BUILD THE WALL

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER

Every sensible immigration policy has two objectives: 1) to regain control of our borders so that we decide who enters; and 2) to find a humane way to deal with the 11 million illegal immigrants who now live among us.

Start with the second. For both practical and moral reasons, America cannot and will not and should not expel 11 million people. That leaves us with two choices: ignore them or figure out a way to legalize them. Ignoring them hasn't worked. But there is also a huge problem with legalization: it creates an irresistible incentive for new illegal immigrants to come.

We say, of course, that this will be the very last, very final, never-again, we're-not-kidding-this-time amnesty. And everyone knows it's phony. That's what was said in 1986, when we passed the Simpson-Mazzoli immigration reform. It turned out to be the largest legalization program in American history -- nearly 3 million people got permanent residency. There was no enforcement. We now have 11 million new illegal immigrants in our midst.

The irony of this whole debate, which bitterly splits the country, is that there is a silver bullet that would not just solve the problem, but also create a national consensus behind it.

A vast number of Americans who oppose legalization and fear new waves of immigration would change their minds if we could radically reduce new -- i.e., future -- illegal immigration.

And we can.

First, build a barrier. Call it a wall. Call it a fence. Call it what you will. Add cameras and sensors. Add drones. Beef up the patrols. All that matters is that we regain control of the border.

Fences work. The triple fence outside San Diego led to a 90 percent reduction in infiltration. Israel's border fence with the West Bank produced a similar decline. Even holier-than-thou Europeans have conceded the point: Hungary, Macedonia, Bulgaria, Austria, Greece, Spain -- why, even Norway -- have all started building border fences to stem the tide of Middle Eastern refugees.

Then enforce two other measures: a national E-Verify system that makes it just about impossible to work if you are here illegally, and a functioning visa tracking system, since 40% of illegal immigrants are visa overstays.

The wall/fence will, of course, be ugly. So are the concrete barriers to keep truck bombs from driving into the White House. Sometimes function has to supersede form.

And don't tell me that this is our Berlin Wall. When you build a wall to keep people in, that's a prison. When you build a wall to keep people out, that's an expression of sovereignty.

Of course, no barrier will be foolproof. But it doesn't have to be. It simply has to reduce the river to a manageable trickle. Once we do, everything becomes possible – including dealing with our 11 million illegal immigrants.

So, let's fix that. Track the visas, do E-Verify, build the damn barrier. It's ridiculous to say that it can't be done.

And who would certify that the border is back in our control? I would have a neutral party, perhaps a commission of retired jurists, issue the judgment. Once they do, we legalize the 11 million, granting them the right to stay and work here.

We can't give them citizenship. That's a bridge too far. You don't get to join the political destiny of the country by entering it illegally. But any children born here would be American – which means that over time the issue resolves itself.

The American people are legitimately angry at the price American society has paid due to illegal immigration. But they are also a generous people. Once they are assured that we do indeed control our borders, that anger will abate. A national consensus will emerge.

Radical border control, followed by radical legalization. No mushy compromise. A solution requires two acts of national will: putting up a wall (along with E-Verify and visa tracking) and absorbing those who broke our laws to come to America.

This is not a compromise meant to appease both sides without achieving anything. It's not some piece of hybrid legislation that arbitrarily divides illegals into those with five-year-old "roots" in America and those without – or some such mischief-making nonsense.

If we do it right, not only will we solve the problem, we will get it done as one nation.

I'm Charles Krauthammer for Prager University.