

Towards an Intelligent Immigration Policy

By [Robert Zubrin](#)

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Over the past few years, some in the conservative movement have allowed a legitimate concern over border security to become conflated with anti-immigration politics. As the recent election shows, this confusion threatens to saddle the Republican party with a losing platform that will become even more unsustainable in years to come.

Some conservatives say that whether it's popular or unpopular, imposing strict limits on immigration is the right thing to do, and it must be defended. Are they correct? Putting aside politics, let us step back and consider, on the basis of first principles, what a proper immigration policy should be.

The bedrock foundation of any rational immigration policy should be to benefit America, rather than benefiting potential or existing immigrants, or any other specific group, whether favorable or antagonistic to them. Therefore, let us consider the effect of immigration upon our economic well-being.

In any economy, the entire population is supported by the part of it that is working. All other things being equal, it thus follows that the most attractive acquisition a society can have is a young adult, whose childhood and education has already been paid for, but whose entire working life still lies ahead. Of course, all other things are not equal. Those with more skills are greater prizes, as they cost more to create and are likely to be more productive in life. This being the case, it is absurd to deny young foreigners who graduate from American universities a path to citizenship.

This logic remains valid for young adults of lesser eminence who still have above-average prospects, including but not limited to those who serve in the military and college-accepted high-school graduates who would be eligible for citizenship under the DREAM Act. They have the skills and the desire to contribute to take advantage of America's economic freedoms, and we should not banish them back to their countries of origin.

The primary counterargument that has been mustered against this point has been that of labor protectionism. For example, in a [PJ Media article](#) attacking the proposal to guarantee a green card to every foreigner who earns a science, technology, engineering, or math (STEM) degree in the United States, Jessica Vaughan, the director of policy studies at the Center for Immigration Studies, writes:

As for stapling the green card to the STEM diploma, this is little more than a marketing tool for U.S. universities to attract more foreign students into paying for degrees in fields that are already saturated. There is no shortage of STEM professionals in the United States; on the contrary, the census shows that there are 1.8 million American engineers who are unemployed or working in other professions.

The illogic of this argument is astonishing. Where does Vaughan imagine that jobs come from? Are they a fixed resource, with only so many to go around? Are the present high American unemployment rates actually being caused by overpopulation? No, jobs are not a resource that exists separately from people. Jobs are *created* by people. Immigrants are famously entrepreneurial: While immigrants constitute 13 percent of the American population, they own 18 percent of small businesses, and, according to a recent study by the Fiscal Policy Institute, were responsible for 30 percent of the growth of U.S. small businesses over the past two decades.

So immigrants as a whole are net job creators. But of all immigrants, STEM graduates are by far the most promising, because

their advanced training allows them to create not only small businesses but large ones, including such recent examples as Intel, SpaceX, Google, eBay, Nvidia, and Yahoo. The nation is indeed suffering from a shortage of such people.

Furthermore, the idea that by excluding immigrant talent from the U.S. work force we can prevent it from competing with Americans is risible. Rather, by excluding skilled or educated foreigners, we guarantee that they will compete with American workers and businesses from other countries. As a result, the jobs, industrial capabilities, and tax revenue that they could have created here will instead be created elsewhere, and America's position in the world market will be further eroded. To cap it all, by giving up the effort to compete for such talent without a fight, we effectively build a Berlin Wall for the benefit of our foreign competition, allowing them to retain skilled people without making the concessions to both liberty and living standards that would otherwise be forced upon them.

Vaughan objects to American universities' financing themselves by charging out-of-state tuition to foreign students. But why? Foreign students who come to the U.S. and pay triple the tuition of their American counterparts provide a subsidy to our educational system. If we were to add the incentive of a green card to the degree, the numbers of such people would expand considerably, and make university education much more affordable for Americans.

And education is not the only area where Americans could reap enormous savings by rejecting the arguments of the labor protectionists. Another is health care. Because of the limited numbers of American medical-school graduates, many specialist doctors are currently taking home salaries above \$400,000 per year. That may be nice for them, but it imposes high medical-care costs on everyone else, and because these costs are typically passed on via health insurance to employers, it is making American industry less competitive internationally and thereby contributing to unemployment. Furthermore, because such specialist salaries are so high, they attract doctors away from providing primary care, and thereby strip many Americans — whether covered with insurance or not — of their access to timely medical assistance. These problems could be readily solved by opening our doors wider to foreign medical talent.

Very well, say some, let's let in educated foreigners, but what about Mexican laborers? Do we need them too? You bet we do. Currently, over half of U.S. farm workers are illegal immigrants from Mexico. American agriculture simply could not function without them. True, they are breaking the law, but if they did not do so, we would not have food. So where does the problem lie — with the illegals, or with the system that makes it illegal for people to do good and necessary work?

Let us consider this problem by imagining a country, which may well be the United States in the not too different future, where federal bureaucracy intrudes itself into the hiring process of all companies, and thus for the purpose of assuring "fairness," or other noble goals, demands several years' worth of paperwork before any private hiring decision can be legally approved. Say you are a businessman living under this regime, and you are running a company that must respond to market conditions with frequent and timely hiring operations. What would you do?

The answer is clear; you would seek to evade the overweening bureaucracy by hiring people off the books, paying them as consultants, or engaging in other tricks. If you did not do so, you would not stay in business. And regardless of those who might denounce you for giving away American jobs to illegal workers, in point of fact, without you and your illegal employees' willingness to brave doing what is necessary to function despite the bureaucracy, no one would get any jobs or products from your company.

While this scenario may seem like an anti-utopian future fantasy, in point of fact it is essentially the situation faced by American farmers and farm workers today. The problem is not with the illegal farm workers, who are willing to work long hours in the hot sun to put food on our tables, but with the dysfunctional federal immigration bureaucracy, which has failed to do its job of providing a means for swift and efficient processing and approval of entry and work permits for people who wish to come to the

United States for mutually beneficial purposes. *That* is the problem that a Republican immigration policy needs to fix. The nation needs a fence, but it also needs a well-functioning door.

Those who defend the current situation of bureaucratic overregulation of immigration and hiring claim that they are defending the rule of law. In fact, just the opposite is true. By keeping Mexican farm workers in an illegal status, they are creating a community within the United States that cannot talk to the police, thus providing a safe harbor for real criminal elements, with a large part of the brutal actions of such dangerous criminals being committed against the Hispanic community itself. Such a situation makes effective law enforcement impossible.

Since the first Thanksgiving, America's tradition has been to welcome immigrants, and it was only with the advent of the progressive movement in the early 20th century that a significant faction of educated opinion aligned itself otherwise. Embracing eugenics, environmentalism, and Malthusian ideology, and suffering from delusions of grandeur as the would-be elite managers of all aspects of society, the progressives sought immigration restriction as a way of controlling and culling the qualities of what they saw as the nation's herd of human racial "stock." Using IQ tests (administered in English and containing many questions relating to baseball and other aspects of Americana) that had been designed for World War I Army recruits as pseudo-scientific proof of the mental inferiority of immigrants, the progressives pushed through laws in the 1920s sharply restricting the immigration of Jews, Slavs, Italians, and other Southern and Eastern Europeans into the United States.

The same crowd also created environmentalism as a political movement, as a way of restricting access to America's natural resources, and the federal bureaucracy, as a way of restricting Americans' personal liberty. Thus, if you go to the redwood forest in California today, you will encounter a plaque to the three leaders of the Save the Redwoods League, Madison Grant, Henry Fairfield Osborn, and Charles Merriam. All three were eugenicists and personal associates of Theodore Roosevelt, progressivism's founding father.

Grant was also vice president of the Immigration Restriction League and the author of the Aryan-supremacist classic *The Passing of the Great Race*. Osborn was vice president of the American Eugenics Society and president of the American Museum of Natural History. In his remarkable keynote speech to the Third International Congress on Eugenics, held at the Museum in 1932, Osborn drew the connection between environmentalism, immigration restriction, and eugenics clearly by stating that overpopulation by allegedly inferior people (including in the United States, with a population of 125 million) was causing resource destruction and unemployment. Two years later, Osborn received the Goethe Medal from Adolf Hitler, but then he died, leaving his part in the cause to be carried on by his son, Fairfield Osborn, who kicked off the postwar environmentalist movement with his 1948 bestseller *Our Plundered Planet*. His nephew, American Eugenics Society president Frederick Osborn, together with John D. Rockefeller III, founded the population-control movement's flagship Population Council in 1952. It is from this group that the anti-immigration movement has sprung.

America is a country defined by a set of ideas, and when people choose to accept those ideas, they should be able to become Americans, as fully so as any — and perhaps more so than most — regardless of how recently they or their ancestors arrived upon our shores. This is the true American tradition, which as conservatives we must defend. We should not abandon our formative principle, which is inclusion and growth, not exclusion and stasis. We should continue to bravely welcome new talent into our ranks, sure in our knowledge, and in our faith, that the more of us there are, the more opportunities we can create, and the more great things we can do.

Americans constitute 4 percent of the world's population, yet are responsible for half its inventions. Consequently, the world needs more Americans, and so do we.

And as for those who still shy away from such an inclusive policy, answer this: Barack Obama was just reelected, at least partly

because the Republican party embraced your preferences. As a result, the U.S. economy will continue to decline, American energy production will continue to be strangled, our deficits will continue to mount towards bankruptcy, our military will be continue to be hollowed out, American foreign policy will continue to support the spread of Islamism, and Iran will get the atomic bomb. Is it worth it?

— *Robert Zubrin is president of Pioneer Astronautics, a senior fellow with the Center for Security Policy, and the author, most recently, of Merchants of Despair: Radical Environmentalists, Criminal Pseudo-Scientists, and the Fatal Cult of Antihumanism.*

EDITOR'S NOTE: *This article has been amended since its initial publication.*

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