

ANOTHER VIEW

Immigration debate laden with irony for Indians



TIM GIAGO

“Ironically, most of the illegal immigrants are Indians, or Indios, as they are known in Mexico, and in Central and South America.”

There was a cartoon floating around Indian country several years ago of two Indian men crouched on a hill watching the Mayflower dropping anchor at what is now Plymouth Rock. In the cartoon one Indian is saying to the other, “Do you think we should start thinking about creating some immigration laws?” Of course, the cartoon was funny then and is funny now. The Indians in the cartoon were attired in the regalia of the Indians of the Northern Plains, but I suppose that is how most Americans see Indians in general — never mind that the Indians of the East Coast dressed in an entirely different manner. I would venture to say that no other segment of the American population was affected by immigration as much as the American Indian. Lands occupied for centuries by the indigenous people were opened up (stolen) and a flood of settlers converged, wiping out the livelihood of the people and forcibly removing many tribal groups to unwanted and unproductive lands. What caused the infamous Trail of Tears? It was the greed

of the immigrant settlers salivating over the rich farmlands and homes of the Cherokee people. With the full support of the United States government, thousands of happy and productive Indian families were uprooted from their homelands and marched to Oklahoma Territory. Many of the elders and young died on this death march. A lot of recent immigrants profited from this callous takeover of Indian lands. Since Sept. 11, the American people have been taking a second look at the porous border between the United States and Mexico. Congress is atwitter with grandiose ideas about how to stem the flow of illegal immigrants. But the one factor looming largest in the newly hatched schemes is greed. Farms and factories would have serious economic problems if their source of cheap labor was suddenly cut off. Latin American immigrants, legal and otherwise, have staged mass protests in hopes of changing the minds of the lawmakers set upon bringing new laws to curb illegal immigration. I find it a little ironic that the protesters

are flying American flags upside down while vigorously waving the flag of Mexico. I often wonder why so many thousands of people left their homelands in Norway, Germany, Ireland, France and so many other countries to settle in a land where the only obstacle to expansion and untold wealth was the indigenous people. How many Americans are aware of the fact that thousands of Indians were shipped to the West Indies as slaves? There they died by the thousands and they also died by the thousands while being used as slave labor in the newly formed colonies. Unable to find the cheap labor for the cotton fields of America and the sugar cane fields of the West Indies, black Africans were rounded up by the millions and brought to America as slave-immigrants. America found it hard to classify Native Americans in those days. They were not citizens of the United States and they were not immigrants. What were they? They were an obstacle standing in the path of Manifest Destiny. Their lands had to be taken illegally or purchased in order to

make room for the influx of immigrants. If America is a shining beacon of hope for legal immigrants perhaps the laws should be adjusted to make it a reality for the illegal immigrants. They also see America as a place where dreams can be lived. Ironically, most of the illegal immigrants are Indians, or Indios as they are known in Mexico, and in Central and South America. Most of their ancestors did not come over on the Mayflower or on the Spanish galleons. They were indigenous to the Western Hemisphere. I admit being surprised when I visited Spain and observed that the people did not look like the indigenous people of the Americas and their restaurants did not serve enchiladas and tacos. No, the brown people of the Americas are Indios and their cuisine of hot chili peppers and tortillas are indigenous foodstuffs. I still hear people say they are going to a certain restaurant to eat “Spanish food.” What would the cuisine of Italy be without a vegetable grown by the Indios called the “tomato?” For that matter all of the chocolate connoisseurs attend-

ing the Winter Olympics in Turin, Italy, would not have had that succulent treat if not for the indigenous people of the Americas. If the citizens of Mexico and other Latin American countries want to immigrate to America they should do it legally even though the first immigrants faced no such provisions. If there were no jobs available, they would not come. The first immigrants would not have come if there was no land available. It is written that many of the original immigrants came to this country in search of freedom of religion. It is a sad chapter in our history that although they found freedom of religion they chose to suppress and destroy the religions of the indigenous people. Many Indians look at that cartoon of the two Indians watching the Mayflower drop anchor and wonder “what if?”

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Entitlements, not earmarks, raise the national debt



KERRY LYNCH

“Since George Bush became president, the borrowing cap has been raised four times, by a total of \$3 trillion.”

In the 1992 presidential campaign, Ross Perot called the national debt “the crazy aunt in the basement that nobody wants to talk about.” The new crazy aunt is entitlement spending — on Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid — which, according to the Bush administration’s own forecasts, will account for 60 percent of the federal budget by 2030. So, while President Bush has been pushing for “earmark” reform to help reduce pork barrel spending, the real break-the-bank danger resides elsewhere. For years now, some fiscal conservatives have advanced the view that if tax cuts result in larger budget deficits, the deficits would create political support for reducing government spending. Indeed, according to this “starve-the-beast” theory, cutting taxes may be the only effective way to rein in spending. As former President Reagan once put it, if you want your children to spend less, sometimes the only way is to cut their allowance. Unlike your children, Congress has another option: It can borrow. In the past four years, congressional borrowing has added \$2.5 trillion to the national debt. Just last month, Washington all but reached its then \$8.2 trillion limit on debt and Congress responded as it always does, by raising the limit again, this time



to \$9 trillion. Since George Bush became president, the borrowing cap has been raised four times, by a total of \$3 trillion. “Starving the beast” isn’t working. So-called earmark reform, as much as it is needed, also won’t work. The term “earmark” refers to money that members of Congress set aside in various budget bills to finance local, pet projects, like the now-infamous bridge to nowhere in Alaska. Most earmarks are far less exotic: money for a local museum, a new road or highway, a hiking or biking

trail. Taxpayers call it pork. Members of Congress call it bringing home the bacon. Ending or curtailing such earmarks is certainly desirable. According to Citizens Against Government Waste, a watchdog group in Washington, the cost of such pork-barrel spending has increased from \$10 billion a year to \$27.5 billion a year over the past decade. The number of projects financed in this manner has increased from 1,400 to some 14,000. Even if all such spending was eliminated, however, the

federal budget would still be spiraling out of control. In truth, earmarks account for only a small part of government spending. Even defense spending, the largest “discretionary” item in the budget, accounts for a relatively small portion, despite the high cost of the Afghanistan and Iraq military operations. Last year, for example, defense expenditures equaled just 4 percent of the U.S. gross domestic product (GDP), the same as in 1994 and less than in the 1980s. The really big money is being spent on Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid and other income assistance programs. And the worst is yet to come, when the 77 million baby-boomers quit working and want “theirs.” Unlike defense spending, Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid are entitlements. Spending is mandatory, rather than discretionary, and spending increases are automatic

— programmed into the system. Medicare spending has been growing especially rapidly, a trend that will accelerate as more seniors sign up for the new Medicare drug benefit and when the first of the baby-boomers become eligible. The drug benefit (Medicare Part D) alone, which will cost an estimated \$720 billion over the next 10 years, should serve as Exhibit A against the notion that budget deficits will force politicians to starve the beast. As most Americans know, the Republican Party claims to favor smaller government. With the White House and Congress in GOP hands, the Republicans did cut taxes. But that’s not the same as cutting government. Indeed, rather than deal with the politically charged issue of rapidly escalating entitlement costs, the GOP did the exact opposite: they planted the seeds to make a bad situation even worse, creating a huge new entitlement program. The crazy aunt in the basement needs help. If she doesn’t get it soon, the national debt will become an overwhelming burden for future generations.

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Smart growth will help L.V. retain young professionals



JOYCE MARIN

“They have their lives and their careers before them, and they want to spend their future here.”

A very exciting event occurred recently at the Hotel Bethlehem. RenewLV, the pro-growth citizen-based organization that embraces a smart growth agenda, and one of its sub-committees, LiveLV, were hosts to a discussion with the Network of Young Professionals and College Valley. The objective of the meeting on March 14 was to seek answers from young people to the question, “How can we make our region better?” Why did we bother to do this? The 2004 Brookings Report on Pennsylvania, “Back to Prosperity, A Competitive Agenda for Renewing Pennsylvania,” highlighted several disturbing statistics about our state. One of the most upsetting was that in spite of having one of the best arrays of colleges and universities in the nation, Pennsylvania loses more 25 to 34 year olds than any state in the nation. So, why not ask the

young professionals who are here what we need to do to keep them here? The answers we got were insightful. By all accounts, the discussion was very fruitful. The people who attended were like you and me. They love the Lehigh Valley and have a stake in the future of our region. They have their lives and their careers before them, and they want to spend their future here. The room was packed with intelligent, earnest young professionals. Some of them came from places generally thought of as more attractive to young people ... San Francisco, Boston, Los Angeles and Miami. Others were from this area, with some having lived here all of their lives and others returning from experiencing other places. They all expressed a deep affection for this region, as well as a sincere desire to celebrate

and respect the best of what is already here. In areas where it was acknowledged that some aspect needed to be improved, many expressed a willingness to help, and they respectfully offered numerous ideas. Some of their ideas, such as preserving open space, indicated a sensitivity to the importance of retaining our rural landscape even as the area develops. Of course, open space preservation is an important initiative already underway by both counties. Other ideas, such as the need to develop what they called, “affordable housing for young professionals,” for instance, studio apartments or condominiums located in the cities and boroughs that sell in the \$100,000 to \$150,000 range, is a fresh idea that may be feasible. Their favorite big idea, bringing passenger rail service to the

region from New York City and Philadelphia is sure to require a sustained mixture of hard work and enthusiasm. A full report on these and their other ideas will be developed within the next month and shared with the leadership of the Lehigh Valley. It will also be made available on the RenewLV website at www.renewlv.org. While we think about how to make the region more attractive to young people, let’s not get bogged down in the details of how to deliver everything right away. Rather, let’s recognize that young professionals’ most significant contribution to the discussion is the same as their most significant contribution to the region: youthful enthusiasm. They believe that whatever it is that you want or you dream, you don’t necessarily have to leave the Lehigh Valley to get it. You can do it here.

Even those of us who no longer qualify as “young” can certainly join them in this positive outlook. Why? Because a “can do” attitude is precisely the thinking that will make the Lehigh Valley a better place to live and work — for everyone. The next community forum by RenewLV and the LiveLV sub-committee, “Protect, Preserve and Renew: How We Can Make Our Region Better,” will be held at 6 p.m. on May 2 at Cedar Crest College. Thomas Hylton, Pulitzer Prize winning author of “Save Our Land, Save Our Towns” will be the keynote speaker. Rick Smith, a Lehigh Valley portrait photographer, will be exhibiting his important work of farmers in the path of development. **Joyce Marin** is the co-chair of RenewLV and serves as a member of borough council in Emmaus.

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