



## UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES CREATED BY OSAMA BIN LADEN: WHY THE U.S. IS STRUGGLING MORE THAN EVER WITH ITS IMMIGRATION POLICY

As we approach the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 9/11 we are thankful for the elimination of its main perpetrator, Osama Bin Laden, 9/11 has had a tremendous impact on our immigration policy. In 1986, Ronald Reagan, in what he viewed as one of his most significant achievements as President of the United States, led a coalition to form an immigration reform law that created employment verification procedures with employer sanctions, as well as protection against discrimination. At the same time the law created a path for lawful status for approximately three and a half million people.

Here we are more than a generation later again attempting to deal with the sticky issue of immigration. We have an entire generation of undocumented persons whose children are U.S. citizens while many of those children's grand-parents, siblings, aunts, uncles and cousins still have no lawful status. The demographers tell us that we will continue to need more persons to support and fuel our economy as the baby boomers retire, while the economic evidence demonstrates that providing legal status to the estimated 11 million undocumented persons in our country will create an economic boon. There is also no doubt that some of the greatest entrepreneurial success stories will come from these very same self selected individuals who came to the United States and literally have had to survive underground as the things we take for granted as Americans have slowly been taken away from them – the ability to get a driver's license, a social security card, a college education, and authorization to work.

While the anti-immigrant forces in the United States have successfully pursued their policy of attrition in taking away the basic needs of the undocumented, we have seen a reduction in the numbers of the undocumented in the last several years; this is certainly no surprise given the recession and the lack of jobs. This reduction is also due to greater enforcement efforts by the federal government and these efforts of local and state police through 287(g).

There can still be little doubt that the most significant barrier to forging comprehensive immigration reform has been 9/11. It created an unfounded fear that undocumented immigrants are terrorists. The facts of 9/11 demonstrated otherwise but nonetheless many U.S. citizens truly believe that among the undocumented must be the next group of al-Qaida terrorists.

We need to continue to do our very best along our borders to keep out criminals and terrorists, but it must also be recognized that the undocumented have been in the United States some for as long as 25 years and they are not terrorists – in part upon their backs we built a booming economy during this last generation.

The level of xenophobia is at an all time high – this has been fueled by the Great Recession and the continuing relative high level of unemployment. But underneath all of this fear is a pilot light that was ignited on 9/11 which has continued to flame. We must deal with 9/11 as a society and understand that those who arrived here before and after that tragic date are productive human beings and not terrorists. They believe, as do the great majority



of Americans, that Osama Bin Laden and al-Qaida are human abominations that need to be eliminated so that we can have a civil discord again where those of different faiths can live reasonably peaceably together on this planet.

With Bin Laden's elimination we now need to re-visit and accurately evaluate our immigration policies and return to a discussion of a more rational and humane solution for comprehensive immigration reform. Let us take this opportunity!

Mark J. Newman