

Option 4: Make Emigration Unnecessary

The people of the world are on the move. Population growth, the spread of war and violence, fears of persecution, and the age-old curses of hunger, poverty, and disease drive people from their homes. The United States is the destination of choice for many of these people. But opening our doors to large-scale immigration causes problems here and abroad. It overburdens schools and the healthcare system. It keeps wages low. It also drains poor countries of many of their most educated, highly skilled workers. This “brain drain” only makes it harder for poorer countries to meet the needs of their own populations. The United States must lead the international community in solving the problems that cause people to leave their countries.

The United States should work with the international community to strengthen economies and end conflicts worldwide. It should also create incentives for the best and brightest to stay where they are and contribute their skills to improve conditions in their own countries. By improving living standards for the world’s disadvantaged, the United States can reduce the forces that drive immigrants to its borders. This process will take time. Humanitarian crises continue to create refugees. The United States must welcome refugees in need and strengthen humanitarian efforts throughout the globe. Eventually, some immigrants will return to their home countries. For others with roots in the United States, there must be a path to citizenship so they can fully contribute to the country moving forward.

Option 4 is based on the following beliefs

- Globalization means that problems affecting other countries are U.S. problems as well.
- The root causes of immigration are poverty, violence, and a lack of access to social services. By developing well-crafted programs of foreign aid and trade benefits, the United States can help people in poor and war-torn countries improve their lives without migrating abroad.
- While the United States has an obligation to reduce suffering wherever possible, the country’s

primary responsibility is to the well-being of those at home. The United States cannot continue to absorb an endless stream of immigrants.

- Assimilation of poor people who do not speak English or who do not have desired skills takes time and financial resources that should instead go to meet U.S. citizens’ needs.

What policies should we pursue?

- Expand foreign aid and trade benefits to help governments in poorer countries to strengthen their economies. Do not engage in foreign policy that will lead to increased violence, poverty, and disempowerment of people abroad.
- Work with other wealthy countries to coordinate the resettlement of existing refugees and prevent future refugee crises.
- Apply consistent, humane standards in grant-

ing political asylum to refugees, rather than mold refugee policy to suit political purposes.

- Gradually reduce the number of immigration visas awarded annually.
- Improve conditions in undocumented immigrants’ countries of origin to discourage undocumented immigration and to encourage the departure of undocumented immigrants from the United States.

From the Record

President Bill Clinton, at the signing of NAFTA, September 14, 1993

“And as the benefits of economic growth are spread in Mexico to working people, what will happen? They’ll have more disposable income to buy more American products, and there will be less illegal immigration because more Mexicans will be able to support their children by staying home. This is a very important thing.”

Pramila Jayapal, executive director of OneAmerica, speaking at the Urban Poverty Forum in Seattle, February 13, 2011

“NAFTA gave the U.S. maximum access to Mexican resources and markets. We conceded very little to Mexico.... Farm workers tried to make a living on their small pieces of land just as their families had done for centuries, but they found that the rules of the game had been changed.... What would you do if you could no longer feed your family? What would you do if your country’s economy has just been destroyed by a neighboring country to the north and now their economy was booming and there were jobs there that needed more and more agricultural workers because their own workers were moving away from that kind of labor in the fields? What would you do if your wife was sick, or your children could not get an education where you were anymore?... So join us in bringing all of us together so we don’t fight against each other but instead, fight against corporations and against government regulations that keep people in poverty all around the world and here in the U.S.”

Senator Marco Rubio, in an interview with Fox News Sunday, August 3, 2014

“We have an unsustainable situation on the border. The only way to address that is to address the root causes: a combination of violence, instability, and poverty in Central America.”

Vice President Joe Biden, December 18, 2015

“And as we were reminded in the summer of 2014 when 50,000 unaccompanied children risked

their lives to escape crime, corruption, violence and poverty to find their way to our southwestern border—the security and prosperity of Central America are inextricably linked with our own.... [T]his decision by Congress to invest \$750 million in Central America demonstrates that we honor our commitments and believe in a future where the Western Hemisphere is middle class, democratic, and secure.”

Noam Chomsky, academic and activist, March 2016

“Now, where are [undocumented immigrants] fleeing from? Mostly from Central America, where they’re fleeing from the results of our policies.”

Jorge Ramos, Mexican American journalist and author, July 6, 2016

“I didn’t want to be an immigrant. I was forced to be an immigrant. Alexis de Tocqueville, the French writer, said that the powerful and the happy never go into exile. He was right.”

Adriana Beltrán, in a WOLA (a human rights organization) article, June 27, 2018

“Given the urgency of the humanitarian crisis at the border, Vice President Pence and Secretary Nielsen ought to focus on the root causes of migration, including the violence and the corruption that undermines the prospects for people to live safely at home....”

Ruth Chojnacki, letter to the editor in the New York Times, June 28, 2018

“To punish migrants for protecting their children from social violence seeded by American foreign policy ignores our own historical complicity in forcing their decision to leave their broken societies. Redirecting billions of tax dollars intended to secure our borders toward programs to stabilize these societies would not only fulfill our moral responsibility to repair the damage we have done but also give Central Americans reason to have hope for and remain in their homelands.”