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Dispelling Some Myths About Our Sisters and Brothers

People in our time are aware of a big wave of newly arriving people in the U.S. This isn't numerically the biggest wave in our national history, just a big number in our lifetime and/or the past century of our 231-year national existence.

Some concerns are surfacing among us about the consequences of the number of our current new arrivals. Sometimes when we humans get concerned, we set up straw persons and do battle with those straw persons. But if the straw persons don't match reality very closely, our battling and problem solving gets unhelpful.

Our U.S. Congress is hard at work on immigration reform. If we are truly to "reform" our current laws and policies about people entering and staying in the U.S., it is important that the reform work be based on accurate information.

Currently there are several myths abounding among us. To help clarify the record -

"IMMIGRANTS DON'T PAY TAXES."

Actually they do: income, property, sales and taxes at the federal and state levels. Estimated total taxes paid : \$90-140 billion a year.

"IMMIGRANTS COME HERE TO TAKE WELFARE"

Actually they come to work and reunite with family members. The North American Free Trade Agreement [NAFTA] has strong subsidies for U.S. farmers; the sale of U.S.-subsidized corn, rice and other products in Mexico has

gravely harmed the Mexican agricultural sector, depleted villages.

Actually the ratio between immigrant use of public benefits and the amount of taxes they pay is consistently favorable to the U.S.

"IMMIGRANTS SEND ALL THEIR MONEY BACK HOME"

Actually they are also consumers in the U.S., contributing some \$162 billion in tax revenue to federal, state and local governments. The money they do send home is one of the most focused and effective forms of direct foreign investment.

"IMMIGRANTS TAKE JOBS FROM AMERICANS"

This large wave of immigration to the U.S. has coincided with our lowest national unemployment rate. Immigrant entrepreneurs create jobs for U.S. and foreign workers.

"IMMIGRANTS ARE A DRAIN ON THE ECONOMY"

In the 1990s, half of all new workers were foreign-born, serving where native-born workers did not choose to work in both the high- and low-skill ends of the spectrum. Alan Greenspan has pointed out that 70% of immigrants arrive in prime working age beyond the normal education age.

"IMMIGRANTS DON'T WANT TO LEARN ENGLISH OR BECOME AMERICANS."

Actually within 10 years of arrival, more than

The Catholic Conference of Kentucky (CCK) is an agency of the Catholic Bishops of Kentucky, established in 1968. It speaks for the Church in matters of public policy, serves as liaison to government and the legislature, and coordinates communications and activities between the church and secular agencies. There are 406,000 Catholics in the Commonwealth. The Bishops of the four dioceses of KY constitute CCK's Board of Directors.

75% of immigrants speak English well.

"TODAYS IMMIGRANTS ARE DIFFERENT"

Immigrants 100 years ago often started out in mono-ethnic neighborhoods, spoke their native languages, built up media and businesses that catered to others in their ethnic group. They likewise faced significant discrimination. The historical record indicates every new wave of immigrants meets suspicion and doubt yet come to be vindicated and saluted.

"MOST IMMIGRANTS CROSS THE BORDER ILLEGALLY"

Actually some 75% today have legal permanent (immigrant) visas; of the 25% undocumented persons, 40% overstayed temporary (non-immigrant) visas.

"WEAK U.S. BORDER ENFORCEMENT LEADS TO HIGH UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRATION"

From 1986—1998 U.S. Border Patrol's budget increased 6-fold and the number of border agents 2-fold. Undocumented

immigrant population doubled in that dozen years. Actually insufficient legal channels for legal immigrant entry into the U.S. compared with the number of jobs needing works contributes significantly to our current difficult situation.

"THE WAR ON TERRORISM CAN BE WON THROUGH IMMIGRATION RESTRICTIONS."

Actually most of the 9/11 hijackers had legal visas. Severe security measures could make us less safe if targeted communities of immigrants become afraid to come forward with information.

FACTS:

Every person is a child of God, a sister or brother having human dignity.

God is on the side of persons who are poor.

(Sources include: Department of Census Data, Homeland Security, Cato Institute, Immigration and Naturalization Service and Justice for Immigrants Campaign)

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