6/5/2024 ; Immigration lemonade

[HALF SECOND OF SILENCE]

[BILLBOARD]

SCORING IN <Funkyzeit>

SEAN RAMESWARAM (Host): Immigration is one of the biggest issues this election. And as we get closer to the showdown between Old and Older™️, there’s less and less daylight between their immigration proposals.

The former president wants to shut down the border.

*<CLIP>The Times and The Sunday Times*

*Donald Trump: it’s never, ever been worse than it is now.*

SEAN: And now the sitting president does, too.

*<CLIP>Guardian News,*

*Joe Biden: We must face the simple truth, to protect America as a land that welcomes immigrants we must first secure the border and secure it now.*

SEAN: The convicted felon wants to reject asylum seekers.

*<CLIP>The Telegraph,*

*Donald Trump: Nobody has any idea where these people are coming from. And we know they come from prisons. We know they come from mental institutions, insane asylums. We know they’re terrorists.*

SEAN: And guess who’s following in his footsteps?

*<CLIP>Guardian News,*

*Joe Biden: Today, I'm announcing actions to bar migrants who cross our southern border unlawfully from receiving asylum.*

SEAN: It turns out a lot of the big ideating on this issue is happening locally. So on *Today, Explained* we’re heading to the Mile High City to talk to their mayor in crisis.

[THEME]

SEAN: When you hear about American cities that are dealing with a migrant crisis, you usually hear about New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Denver. Denver’s seeing more migrants showing up per capita than any other American city. Over 40,000 migrants have shown up so far. That’s close to a 7% increase in the city’s population, except without shelter or food. But if you talk to the Mayor of Denver, a Democrat named Mike Johnston, it sounds like he didn’t get the memo about his crisis.

MIKE JOHNSTON (Mayor, City of Denver): We think this is, for us being a real example, that what appears as a crisis is actually an opportunity. You know, the only crisis we have is we have folks who arrive in our city every day and say, ‘Mr. Mayor, all I want is a job. Can I please work?’ And I have CEOs who call me every day and say, ‘Mike, I got 50 open jobs in my company. Why can't I please have those folks that just got here?’ And our only challenges. We have a federal government that stands in the middle and doesn't allow those employees to work for employers who want to hire them, but we feel like we've been able to find solutions to all of those problems. And we're going to turn this, this crisis into an opportunity for Denver.

SEAN: This work thing is the biggest thing.

Everyone from former New York Mayor Mike Bloomberg to sitting Topeka Mayor Mike Padilla to the mayor of Denver, Mike Johnston, wants to let migrants do what they came here to do: make money.

MAYOR MIKE: You know, when I first took this job – nine months ago, we sat down with Secretary Mayorkas, Governor Polis and I, and we really asked him quite directly, what we really need is just work authorizations. Folks just need the ability to work.

*<CLIP> Denver7, Expansion of work permits to Venezuelan migrants*

*Anchor 1: hundreds of thousands of people who came to the U.S from Venezuela will receive legal status as the number of people fleeing that country rapidly grows*

*Anchor 2: the Biden Administration will grant temporary work permits for people who arrived in the U.S before July 31st*

MAYOR MIKE: That was a game changer for us. Republicans, of course, then tried to impeach him for that.

*<CLIP> Forbes Breaking News, Marjorie Taylor Greene*

*Marjorie Taylor Greene: The American people are fed up. We have an invasion border and Americans are dying every single day. And people want Mayorkas impeached. They want accountability.*

MAYOR MIKE: But after that, what we found was more and more of the folks that arrived to us did not have temporary protective status

*<CLIP>CBS News, Temporary Protected Status program*

*Reporter: This was a policy that was created by congress to offer a temporary safe haven to migrants from countries facing a humanitarian crisis like Venezuela is right now.*

MAYOR MIKE: and did not also have what's called Customs and Border Protection one, which is an app you can use on your phone to set up an appointment at Customs and Border Protection. And if you set up an appointment, you can also get a work authorization within 30 days. So there was a wave of folks that came with that. Either of those populations, we could help get into work in about a month, and we created infrastructure to do that. We had one of the largest legal authorization work authorization clinics in the country to move about 2000 people through work authorization, get them up and on their feet.

*<CLIP> FOX31 Denver*

*Reporter: During these clinics, local nonprofits volunteers and city staff help newcomers file the paperwork to receive federal work permits.*

MAYOR MIKE: The challenge for us was that when the third wave came this year in 2024, it's now almost all people who are what we call asylum seekers. They don't have temporary protective status, they don't have Customs and Border Protection, they don't really have any path to work authorization. And because of the backlog in the asylum courts, their asylum court dates are set for the year 2030 or 2031. So they have a 6 or 7 year wait and they can't work in the interim. And so that was where we saw the biggest challenge, what many cities were facing. But the solution we've built now, the asylum seeker program, we've launched is designed to show that even this most difficult situation is actually solvable here at the local level.

*<CLIP> CBS Colorado, Denver's new Asylum Seeker Program*

*Reporter: through denver’s asylum seeker program, migrants will get legal help for each asylum application*

MAYOR MIKE: And what we've done is set up an infrastructure. We, we will actually proactively apply for all those people for asylum up front.

*<CLIP> CBS Colorado, Denver's new Asylum Seeker Program*

*Reporter: the program will also include job training, food assistance through a monthly debit card, and rental assistance for six months.*

MAYOR MIKE: While the courts may still take seven years to resolve the case, that means now they could get access to work authorization within six months. And so now what we have to do is build a six month workforce training program to help fill those six months ~~while they are waiting for work.~~ And so instead of seeing that as a a risk, we see it as an opportunity, which is what kind of workforce training do we want to give people for those six months that will include English language skills? We'll include financial literacy, digital literacy. It will include certifications in any relevant field they want to enter, and it will include on the site workforce training that was unpaid internship type experiences in the career industry of their choice. So by the time they reached that six month mark, they have English language skills, they have digital skills, financial skills, they have relevant certifications, and they have on the job experience in the profession they want to enter. And now we've taken this crisis and made it into an actually an incredibly important and useful workforce pipeline into our highest need professions here in the city. We're really excited to get that launched.

SEAN: It sounds like you're having a really positive experience here. Positive for the city, positive for these migrants. But certainly this is placing various stresses on on the city's resources, on your budgets. Can you talk a bit about that?

MAYOR MIKE: That is definitely not been easy. We've worked very hard to get to this place, so there are a lot of failures that went into it before we get, some of the solutions that we found that have worked. And you're right – to provide these services well, cost money. So this will cost us about $90 million this year to lead this effort all in.

*<CLIP> 90M ‘newcomer’ budget, FOX Denver*

*Reporter: HERE IS WHERE THE MONEY WOULD COME FROM EXACTLY. YOU'VE GOT NEARLY 46 MILLION DOLLARS FROM BUDGET CUTS AND OTHER TWEAKS. THE CITY SAYS THAT MOST COMES FROM THE VACANCY SAVINGS CATEGORY. YOU SEE THERE THAT BASICALLY MEANS THAT THEIR OPEN POSITIONS, OPEN JOBS THAT WILL NOT BE FILLED*

MAYOR MIKE: So that is a big investment that we were not planning on making a year ago. And so it certainly hasn't been without difficulties. We've had city workers have had to be reassigned from regular jobs at Department of Human Services into being intake and case management and support for newcomers that have arrived.

SEAN: Hm.   
  
MAYOR MIKE: We have nonprofit communities who've been overwhelmed by the amount of support they've been. Asked to provide regular citizens every day who are bringing people into their homes and into their basements, or taking on families to help pay their down payments to get them into apartment units. So it is. It has certainly challenged the city, but the city has shown up in incredible ways where it's not a day that goes by. I don't meet someone who says, oh, ‘thanks so much, Mr. Mayor. I actually have a family, Venezuelans myself, that I helped get a house last week’ or ‘I just provided some food for. I just provided a backpack for a classmate of my son who's a brand new newcomer from Venezuela’. So I think the city has has risen to the occasion in wonderful ways, and for me is a real proof point for a very different way the country can look at this challenge, which is really not a crisis, but an opportunity. And in most cities, I find that to be true. When I talk to a lot of Midwestern cities, cities that have, you know, dying populations, they are desperate for new workers and for new residents. They would love to have folks arrive if those individuals come with work authorization, if they can work to support themselves, they're an asset to your community. If they can't and they have to rely on public services, there are costs to your community. So this is we think what we're trying to shift is how do we move people from being cost to being what they want to be, which is assets to help the community. And if they can work, they can do that.

SEAN: You know, hearing you talk about this, you know, quote unquote crisis, it hardly even sounds like a crisis. The way you talk about it. You sound like the, you know, glass half full version of this crisis compared to, I mean, especially in New York, where I believe the mayor said that this crisis could…

*<CLIP> MAYOR ERIC ADAMS: destroy New York City. Destroy New York City. We’re getting 10,000 migrants a month.*

SEAN: What do you think sets your administration, your city, apart from the other experiences that are being had across this country?

MAYOR MIKE: The challenges are not simple. I do not want to any way communicate that. We have heroic city employees who have worked around the clock to insist on finding new solutions, and it's been hard without the federal support we wanted. When that bill died,

*<CLIP> New York Post – House Speaker Mike Johnson: Republicans simply cannot vote for the bill in good conscience.*

MAYOR MIKE: You know, we said we wanted three things either more work authorization, you know, more federal dollars help support us, or an actual coordinated entry system to send people to cities where we had capacity based on what we knew about those cities, the way we do for other asylum seekers. Right. When folks arrive from Ukraine or Afghanistan, we don't let the governor of New York decide where to send them all because they land at JFK. There's actually a coordinated plan to send them to cities where there are available jobs. They come with work authorization, they come with federal resources, and they have succeeded. So … I don't have a partisan solution here. We have the solutions that work and those that don't. This is one that works. And I would say the most conservative members of my community will come to me and say, ‘Mike, this is crazy. Those folks, when they arrive here should have to work.’ And then the most progressive groups will say, ‘Mike, this is unfair. Our immigrants who are here should be able to work.’

SEAN: <chortles>

There's actually quite clear alignment on this idea. It's not complicated.

SCORING IN <dislotec - Pitbull (instrumental)>

SEAN: Mayor Mike Johnston, Denver Colorado.

How the United States can put migrants to work, when we’re back on *Today, Explained*.

[BREAK]

[BUMPER]

SEAN: Denver Mayor Mike Johnston thinks he’s got a solution to his migrant crisis: Let people work. And that’s not just a Democrat idea:

DAVID J BIER (Director of Immigration Studies, The Cato Institute): David J. Bier. I'm the director of immigration studies at the Cato Institute. And, we are, known as the libertarians in D.C..

SEAN: David J. Bier and some libertarian-leaning colleagues at Cato recently got together and proposed a whole slew of ideas that could help get this country out of its immigration crisis.   
  
His contribution? State-sponsored visas.

DAVID: So this idea is to have state governments be able to sponsor someone for a visa in the same way that, you know, employers under their current system can sponsor some people or family members can sponsor their relatives. States could basically sponsor whomever they want under whatever type of system they want – target certain industries. You know, there's no year round temporary work visa for non seasonal, low skilled jobs in this country. So think meatpacking plants. A lot of places have a desperate need for workers who are willing to go out on natural resource intensive jobs, mining and, and oil rigs and so forth. These are jobs where there's huge demand and not many workers willing to do them. And there's nothing for the legal immigration system right now. So the idea would be let states figure it out!

SEAN: Has anybody ever tried something like this before? Obviously we haven’t

DAVID: Yeah. So actually Canada.

SEAN: CANADA!

*<CLIP> “Hotline Bling” – Drake*

*Drake: Ever since I left the city–*

DAVID: Eh? Yeah. Canada actually has a much stronger version of federalism than the United States does in many ways, where their provinces historically had a very strong role to play in immigration. And that is continued on through their provincial nominee program. The provinces can nominate someone for permanent residence in Canada, and they're granted permanent residence, based on the states’ Go ahead. And it's one of the more popular programs because it is responsive to the state in which the person is being sponsored. And so that lends itself to having a little bit more political support for it as well.

SEAN: Kristie De Peña focuses on immigration policy at Niskanen Center, named after William Niskanen, economic advisor to Ronald Reagan, notable Republican. Kristie *also* wants to see migrants working in the United States.

KRISTIE DE PENA (Senior Vice President for Policy and Director of Immigration Policy, Niskanen Center) : There are businesses across America that are desperate for more workers. And it's really impacting negatively the economic productivity in lots of these places. And you see places, like Utah, like Indiana, trying to come up with ways that they can get more meaningfully involved in encouraging folks to come here and controlling migration to some of their states.

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SEAN: As in, Utah and Indiana, red states, have been begging the federal government to *let* them do this – to let them put migrants to work.

DAVID: Utah in 2010 actually passed a bill requiring the governor to lobby the federal government for the right to sponsor people for work visas so that they could resolve some of these immigration issues at the state level. The Indiana governor, the current Utah governor have put out, an op-ed saying we would like this authority, let states lead the way on immigration reform.

*<CLIP>Gov. Cox, ABC4 Utah Utah Gov. Spencer Cox: We do need more immigrants in in our country. We have so many job openings right now in in the state of Utah and in other places that cannot be filled it's actually hurting our economy that we can't have good people that that want to live here come in here.*

DAVID: And, you know, other states have passed resolutions in Georgia and elsewhere saying, ‘Look, we want some of this power to deal with these issues.’

SCORING OUT

KRISTIE: Topeka, Kansas, right now is so desperate for new people that it just launched the *Choose Topeka* program:

*<CLIP>migrants encouraged to make Topeka home, NewsNation*

*Reporter: Topeka Kansas has about 7,000 open jobs right now they also have believe it or not a growing Hispanic community so in the last couple of years Topeka Kansas decided why not sort of merge the two use that growing Community as a solution to all of those open jobs they recently started doing all of their marketing in both English and in Spanish*

KRISTIE: It provides people with $15,000 if they are willing to rent or buy homes in the city, and are employed by a local business that is partnering with that program. So I don't know that it's a destination city, but it is certainly a place that has some of the indicators that, you know, they have a lot of jobs, they have affordable housing. So it's specifically tailored towards people that already have work authorization. They are obviously creating programs that are trying to entice new people to come there because they need more people. And they are not alone. There are many, cities and localities that are looking at programs that are going to incentivize new arrivals, especially in these places that have really high levels of kind of declining economic productivity for, you know, any number of reasons.

SEAN: Topeka proves that putting people to work isn’t that far out of the realm of possibility. And we already kinda do stuff like this at the federal level.

KRISTIE: So the program that comes to mind is the Conrad 30 Waiver Program. It's also been around for decades. It allows foreign medical graduates to waive the requirement that they return to their home country for two years after they finish medical school in the U.S.

*<CLIP> Grey’s Anatomy Dr. Bailey: Your first shift starts now and lasts 48 hours you're interns grunts nobodies bottom of the surgical food chain run labs write orders work every second night until you drop and don't complain!*

KRISTIE: They are allowed to waive it if they are willing to go to a rural or a medically underserved area.  
  
SEAN: Aha!

KRISTIE: Since 2001, that program has allowed more than 21,000 physicians to treat about 44 million Americans.

SEAN: Wow.   
  
KRISTIE: Each state gets 30 visas, but we're finding that some states don't choose to use any or all of them. There is a new bipartisan bill that is led by Republicans who you might not otherwise think is being very pro-immigrant, but it would allow states to compete for the unused visas, which can sometimes reach into the hundreds.

*<CLIP> Durbin Delivers Opening During Immigration Subcommittee, SenatorDurbin: I traveled my state in the month of August from the city of Chicago to the most rural areas of Illinois. The message was consistently the same – they are facing a dramatic shortage of nurses, a dramatic shortage of doctors. And what we’re trying to do here is find a solution to this. But as long as we’re stuck on the issue of law enforcement, we can’t even address this.*

SEAN: Now, there’s a difference between work visas and work permits. But what they have in common is the federal government can issue them. And some people in Congress are trying. Work permits were a part of the bipartisan immigration reforms that failed earlier this year.

*<CLIP> New York Post House Speaker Mike Johnson: The bill expands work authorizations for illegal aliens, threatens American workers wages and also acts as another magnet for illegal immigration it's a pull factor … That's not the message that is helpful to send around the world.*

SEAN: But work visas are far from the only thing the federal government could do to help cities and states in crisis. Aaron Reichlen-Melnick is the policy director at the American Immigration Council. And he’s brave enough to be out here saying it’s time to grow the federal government to better deal with immigration. He wants a whole new department. He’d call it “The Center for Migrant Coordination.”

AARON REICHLEN-MELNICK (Policy Director, American Immigration Council): So when we're talking about the Center for Migrant Coordination, we are talking about a federal center located within the Department of Homeland Security.  
  
SEAN: Hm.

AARON: In particular, we're talking about a agency or component within the Department of Homeland Security that has its primary role of establishing federal leadership in migrant response. Some of this could be done at an executive level without changes from Congress. And some of this would require Congress to set up and fund this new center within the Department of Homeland Security.

SEAN: This is obviously a boatload of work. But it’s not like this work’s not being done. It’s just that everyone else is having to pick up the slack.

*SCORING IN <Ice Cream Truck EMDR - Ver A - Minimal Kick>*

AARON: The people who are picking up the slack are cities, state governments and local nonprofits themselves. For example, there are nonprofits in Texas who are in contact with New York City employees and letting them know, we've got buses coming your way.

*<CLIP> ABC News Gov. Greg Abbott: New York City is a self-declared sanctuary city and so why he's ever complaining for one moment about these people being bussed into a city goes against his own self-declaration of being a sanctuary city.*

AARON: You know, at first, you know, when Greg Abbott started sending buses to New York, they weren't telling New York that the buses were on their way. And the only way cities like New York were finding out is because non-profits on the ground in Texas were letting them know.

*<CLIP> Eyewitness News ABC7NY MAYOR ADAMS: I'm announcing an executive order requiring charter buses transporting migrants, those often contracted by the State of Texas, to provide 32 hours notice in advance of their arrival into New York City.*

AARON: At the same time, there has also been a growth of coordination and coalition building, both within the nonprofit movement and also at the city and state level for receiving communities. They're talking to each other more. They're getting together, they're strategizing on best practices. But all of this work has been happening without the federal government, which has the most information, the most resources, and arguably the greatest responsibility to actually play a role.

SCORING OUT

MELANIE: I think they have to, because it's our only option.

SEAN: Melanie Nezer is with the Women's Refugee Commission in New York City.

MELANIE NEZER (Vice President for Advocacy and External Relations, Women's Refugee Commission): We can't wait for the federal government to act. Ideally they would. Ideally, we would have common sense immigration reform that meets our labor needs, our economic needs, our security needs, that allows for persecuted people to continue to find refuge in this country. But I think, you know, we have to move forward with the, in the world that we are living in. And so right now, it's where … all the action is at the state and local level. That's where the energy is. That's where people are seeing the direct effects of people coming. No cities have to act. The federal government, as we know we've seen for decades, does not have to act. There are no real consequences for that, at least, that we can see, you know, electorally.

SCORING IN <Cellocell (sad, fast)>

MELANIE: So, you know, so punting on immigration seems to be a winning strategy. I don't know, it's terrible for the country, but that's, that's where we are. And so, so states and local communities have to lead the way. And that comes down to community based organizations that are trusted. That's, that's the only way forward.

SEAN: Americans increasingly see immigration as our biggest problem. That likely won’t last. But what will is that people will always wanna come to this country, Irrespective of who’s in charge. Because a whole lotta people out there still believe that …

*<CLIP>*

*Associated Press,*

*Trump: America is the greatest place on Earth*

*<CLIP>CSPAN*

*President Biden: the greatest nation on earth*

SEAN: So we’re gonna have to figure out what to do about immigration. And we haven’t made much of any progress at the federal level in thirty years. And we might not in the next few. But if you want to feel hopeful, you can look local.

DAVID: Having the states be these, you know, laboratories of democracy, they call them, where they, can test out different ideas and figure out what's working and what's not and solve some local problems where we don't end up in a situation where the situation just gets worse and worse and you end up with more and more problems, and it builds from the local level, from the state level into a national crisis.

SCORING BUMP

SEAN: That was David J. Bier from the Cato Institute.

You also heard from Kristie De Peña from Niskanen Center, Aaron Reichlen-Melnick from the American Immigration Council and Melanie Nezer from the Women’s Refugee Commission.

Our program today was produced by Hady Mawajdeh, with help from Matthew Collette, Laura Bullard, David Herman, Andrea Kristinsdottir, Jolie Myers and me!

I’m Sean Rameswaram. This is *Today, Explained*.

[10 SECONDS OF SILENCE]