Jessica Bolhuis

CSIA 6010

In Offence of Everyone

September 9, 2016

**Undocumented Immigration**

An undocumented immigrant is a kinder, more politically correct, way of saying an illegal immigrant.  The term undocumented is not as commonly known or used, but when used it helps make known a person's position on the topic.  Individuals who use the term undocumented tend to defend the rights for undocumented immigrants, while individuals who use the term illegal tend to criticize the rights for undocumented immigrants. Referring to an immigrant as an illegal can come across as dehumanizing that person.  This topic is a sensitive subject for many individuals, and referring to immigrants as illegals can come across as offensive.  Even though I am stating that using the term illegal can be offensive, I will still be using it throughout this paper.  I don’t mean to be offensive to anyone, I am just stating my position on the topic.  Using the term illegal helps illustrate my beliefs over the controversial topic of illegal immigration, and that I believe it is an issue in the United States and new systems need to be set in place in order to control it and fix it. However, I do not believe the issues fully stem from the illegal immigrants themselves.  The United States has made it extremely difficult for an immigrant to gain citizenship.  I believe that if the United States is going to fix the issues stemming from illegal immigration, the United States will need to fix the systems that are set in place for becoming a legal immigrant.

Illegal immigration is an issue in the United States for the reasons that it has a negative impact on employment opportunities, minimum wages, and taxpayer funded government services.  With an estimated eleven million illegal immigrants residing in the United States, they are taking employment away from low-skilled working Americans.  The illegal immigrants’ willingness to work for lower wages does depreciate the minimum wages for these low-skilled jobs.  Minimum wages will not be increased when there is a surplus of illegal immigrants constantly taking low-skilled jobs at a lower payment rate. When an American citizen is employed, and working these low-skill jobs, they are required by law to be paying taxes that go to funding government services. When illegal immigrants are working these low-skill jobs they are able to slip through the government laws. They are able to be paid under the table and they do not pay the taxes that citizens are required to pay. Which means these illegal immigrants are not helping fund the government services, yet they are still consuming the services. Some of these taxpayer funded government services include public education, food stamps, and hospitalizations. These illegal immigrants are able to educate their children by enrolling them into public school.  They meet requirements for receiving food stamps.  They also are able to receive medical attention from emergency rooms, which has a severe impact on the hospitals. Emergency rooms do not have to receive any payment before admitting patients and treating the patients. This then results in the patients being discharged from the hospital, where they will leave without paying for the treatment received and face no consequence for this act. Another issue to mention about illegal immigration is that there are illegal immigrants who cause an excess of drugs, gangs, and crime.  The illegal immigrants who are caught doing illegal acts are then sentenced in our prison system, which is again funded by taxpayers.

It is unfair to say that all illegal immigrants play a role and contribute to these issues within the United States.  Personally, I believe there are many illegal immigrants who are contributing to the greater good. However, it is the unfortunate truth that there are just too many illegal immigrants who are taking advantage of our systems. These are the illegal immigrants that need to be deported and the ones that should be denied citizenship. There are many illegal immigrants who had tried to do the right thing by going through the system and following the laws to gain documentations for their citizenship.  However, the system that the United States has for immigrants to gain these documentations and become a legal immigrant is dreadful to deal with.  The system is a long process, a financial burden, an abundance of complex laws, and confusing nevertheless.  For immigrants who are trying to abide by the law and follow the proper channels, it’s near impossible to decipher through all that needs to be done.  This system that is set in place for immigrants needs to become easily understandable, and should move to become a merit based immigration system.

Currently there are five main channels for legal immigrants to come to the United States.  The five channels are: family based, employment based, political asylum and refugees, the diversity visa lottery program, and humanitarian relief.  Within these five main channels there are multiple categories concerning different immigrants which all contain different rules.  There are numerous special immigration programs and an excessive amount of immigration visa categories.  To top it all off, there are limits and quotas that the Immigration and Nationality Act has set in place.  It comes as no surprise that immigrants cannot understand all the laws and come to the United States legally.  The United States needs to standardize the process and develop a simple system to follow.  By establishing a merit based immigration system we can inherit an effective, fair, and simple process for immigrants.  The current five main channels can be consolidated down to only three main channels.  Legal immigrants should be able to come to the United States through a family based channel, an employment based channel, or a humanitarian based channel.  These three main channels would still need to have subcategories within them, but they can be kept to a minimum by creating broad and simple categories.

The family based channel should not have to change far from what it currently is, and it should remain because no country should be so heartless to keep family apart.  We should accept applicants through this channel who are immediate family members to a United States citizen.  There should then be two categories for these applicants.  One category being for immigrants who are skilled and able to work, therefore they are able to contribute to the economy and support their own well-being. The second category will be for immigrants who may be too young or too old for work, but have an immediate family member who is able to financially support them. The employment based channel should provide a better opportunity for immigrants who have skills and experience in the work force.  These immigrants will be able to contribute and help the economy of the United States. This channel should be the most simple of them all.  If you have the necessary skills, you get the documentations.  The channel would eliminate the diversity visa lottery program, which is an unfair chance for skilled immigrants to become a legal immigrant. The channel should also put an end to the quotas that need to be met and limits not to be exceeded and allow for each immigrant to be afforded the opportunity to gain citizenship based on each individual immigrant's application.  The humanitarian based channel will include all humanitarian efforts that it currently focuses on, along with political asylum and refugees.  This channel will help immigrants who are under conditions that prohibit them from being able to reside in their own countries.

The previously discussed channels are they ways that immigrants are able to become a legal American citizen.  However, those channels are not the only way that immigrants come into the United States.  Many immigrants apply for temporary visas for employment opportunities, educational opportunities, for leisure travel, or for any other personal reason.  An issue that comes along with all these issued visas is that not all the immigrants leave when the visa expires.  These immigrants have made a home in the United States and do not wish to leave, so they don’t. The now illegal immigrants continue to work, continue to education themselves, and they build relationships and families.  The channels for gaining legal citizenship in the United States has many issues, and the systems for issuing temporary visas have their own.  The system set in place is once again complex and not enforced.  The amount of temporary visas that immigrants are able to apply for also needs to be reduced into less categories.  The abundance of categories that are available to apply for a visa only add to the complexity of the system.  Again, we can reduce the number of visas that are issued into three categories.  There should be a temporary work visa, a student visa, and a visitor’s visa.

Having strictly one category for a working visa without any subcategories will let the economy decide what kind of workers are needed.  Visas will be approved and granted based on the needs of the market.  This will also help to get rid of the quotas and limits because the market will be the deciding factor for the amount of visas that get approved.  These temporary work visas will also only be approved if the applicant has an employment opportunity in the United States. The visa needs to granted for the amount of time of the employment contract.  Immigrants will be able to renew their visas as long as their employment contract is extended. With these employment visas, tax laws need to be regulated and clearly defined.  Immigrant workers need to be required to pay income taxes, social security taxes, and Medicare taxes. However, since these workers are not United States citizens, they should not be receiving any welfare benefits.  This may sound unfair, but there will still be an opportunity for the immigrants to receive them.  Immigrants under a temporary working visa can apply for citizenship through the employment based channel. Upon recipient of becoming a legal immigrant, the immigrant would then be eligible for welfare benefits. The time the immigrant had already spent working while under a visa will be included in their overall benefits.  The student visas will only be granted when the applicant has been accepted and committed to attending a school.  This visa will last for the duration of the schooling, forcing the immigrant to apply for an employment visa or apply for the employment based channel if they desire to stay in the United States. The visitor’s visa should have a specific time frame permitted and can be renewed if no criminal activity is done. All of the visas should only be granted if the applicant has no record or criminal activity.

Illegal immigration is an issue within the United States, and it does have a negative impact on our economy.  The answer to this issue is not to be deporting all the illegal immigrants. The answer to this issue is to be fixing the systems set in place for legal immigration. A simple, merit based system will benefit immigrants and benefit the United States. The majority of the immigrants who will be given citizenship will be decided by the market. The market will have the say on who enters the United States and the benefits that the immigrants can provide to the economy. The system will only allow immigrants to come to the United States if they pass a background check and have no criminal record. This will help reduce the drugs and crimes because we will better screen immigrant applications and not allow criminals to come over. Employment opportunities will become more competitive among workers who have the same set of skills, which will give workers the ability to negotiate wages. Being able to negotiate wages will help develop a positive impact to the overall minimum wage. The current laws that are established for legal immigration are the cause of issue. Establishing a new system will have a positive impact on immigration and on the United States.

Thinking past what the United States is now and to what immigration used to be, it amazes me how our system has become so complicated. We all have ancestors who were at one point in time an immigrant to this country. During this time it was easier to become a citizen of the United States when the laws and regulations we currently have were not in effect. Except, when you ask an American citizen today what their culture is, the majority of individuals are quick to respond by stating their European, African, Hispanic, or any other decent from their ancestors. What most American citizens are not quick to say is that they come from an American culture. The United States has been founded on, continuously developed, and constantly improving because of the immigrants that have come over. I do not understand why Americans are so hypocritical on immigrants now. Yes, I have been using the term illegals and I believe the controversial topic of illegal immigration is an issue in the United States. Nevertheless, this issue is not a problem stemming from the illegal immigrants themselves, the issue is because of the way Americans choose to support immigrants who are trying to obey our laws and systems.

**References**

Demby, Gene. “In Immigration Debate, 'Undocumented' Vs. 'Illegal' Is More Than Just

Semantics.” NPR. N.p., 30 Jan. 2013. Web. http://www.npr.org/sections/itsallpolitics/

"How the United States Immigration System Works." American Immigration Council. N.p., 12

Aug. 2016. Web.http://thefederalist.com/

Raleigh, Helen. "How To Fix Our Messed-Up Immigration System So It Boosts The

Economy." The Federalist. N.p., 08 Aug. 2016. Web. http://thefederalist.com/