

Gwinnett Opinions: Illegal immigrant angst; We depend on illegals, like it or not

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Body

There is an old saying that we should be careful what we pray for because we might get it.

The state Legislature has pending bills that take a hard line on **illegal** immigration. There is concern that **illegal immigrants** are costing Georgia too much money because of the public services they receive.

I believe it would be a good idea to view the immigration problem from a different perspective.

There are 48 contiguous states and, once in the country, **immigrants** are free to travel to any of them. I believe many Hispanics came to Georgia because the early arrivals were able to find work and, socially, Georgians were **not** hostile to them. Some of these **immigrants** came here legally. Many have come illegally.

A good climate, plentiful jobs and acceptance continued to lure them --- to the United States and to Georgia.

Georgia has benefited from this migration. Jobs are being filled now that would **not** even exist if it had **not** been for the infusion of these hard-working people. They have created wealth in this state that benefits all of us. Many native Georgians now have jobs because of the ripple effect of the Hispanic economic impact.

We need to realize that **illegal immigrants** had to sneak into the country and then had to travel another 1,000 miles to get to **Gwinnett** County. If Georgia becomes inhospitable to **illegal immigrants** they will go elsewhere, and future **immigrants** will avoid the state. This may be the goal of the pending legislation, but that gets us back to being careful of what we pray for.

If **illegal immigrants** begin avoiding the state and those here begin to leave, the financial impact on Georgia will be greater than the loss of the General Motors plant in Doraville and the Ford plant in Hapeville. The impact will be statewide.

Crops will go unharvested, chickens unprocessed, fewer houses will be built and lawn care business will shrink. Restaurants will find it difficult to staff their kitchens. The list goes on and on.

Whether we **like** it or **not**, for many services, **Gwinnett** has come to **depend** on these people.

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If they leave our county and state, it will drive up the prices of the services and products they supply because the goods and services these people are now producing will be gone. That impact alone will probably be greater than the money currently being spent on public services for these people.

So as the Legislature contemplates this legislation and considers the polls that indicate 80 percent of Georgians support tough legislation on this issue, I think politicians under the state dome had better consider how fickle public **opinion** is when laws impact the quality of their lives.

Illegal immigration is a problem that needs to be addressed, but it needs to be addressed on the federal level. Any state that takes unilateral action against these hardworking people will simply drive them to other states, and those states will benefit at Georgia's expense.

At the federal level, we need to develop a worker permit system that allows these people free movement across our borders. It is clear that American business needs them, and they improve the lives of U.S. citizens. If here legally, they would be able to pay taxes, and that would mean they would support the public services they receive.

Without changes in federal immigration policies, if we want **illegal immigrants** to help pay for public services, perhaps we need to consider altering Georgia's tax structure. It is difficult for **illegal immigrants** to pay income taxes. Being here illegally makes it difficult to obtain a Social Security number. Though some might use tax ID numbers, most probably do **not**.

No one can avoid paying a sales tax. Perhaps we need to reduce Georgia's income tax and increase its sales tax. This would increase the state's tax base among **illegal immigrants**, and that money could be designated to public services.

More important, they would remain in the state and continue to improve our quality of life.

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