

## *Clarity is elusive in immigration debate*

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**Byline:** Bill McClellan • , [bmcclellan@post-dispatch.com](mailto:bmcclellan@post-dispatch.com), , 314-340-8143

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### **Body**

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If you think the current debate about illegal immigration is not confusing, you ought to talk with Arcelia Hernandez. She is a U.S. citizen of Mexican descent. She works for a businessman I know who is thoughtful and conservative. He suggested I talk with her.

Because he is conservative, I figured she would probably be taking a conservative position. Why else would he suggest I speak with her?

Then again, I am not quite sure what the conservative position is on this subject. After all, President Ronald Reagan supported and signed legislation in 1986 that granted legal status to 1.7 million people who were here illegally. President George W. Bush favored comprehensive immigration reform that also would have included amnesty.

But now that Barack Obama is president, the conservative position seems to be that illegal immigration is out of control and the federal government is not doing enough.

Arizona is right, say many conservatives - although hardly anybody seems to know exactly what Arizona's controversial law really entails. It is supposed to empower local police to catch illegals, but the Arizona governor insists that racial profiling will not be tolerated.

How do you catch Mexicans without looking for Mexicans? It is Mexicans they're talking about, isn't it?

Like I said, it's all very confusing.

I spoke with Arcelia about a week ago.

She told me her parents were born and reared in the state of Zacatecas in central Mexico. Their families had small farms. Ranches, actually. They had cows.

Her father, Jose, walked through the desert and crossed the border illegally in about 1970. He picked strawberries in California. Then he went back to Zacatecas and married Enriqueta. Then he crossed the border illegally again and found another job picking fruit in California.

About a year later, Enriqueta crossed the border illegally and joined her husband.

Jose got a job in a nursery. He and his wife spoke no English. They had almost no formal education. They had six children, all of whom were U.S. citizens by virtue of being born in this country. Arcelia was the fourth of the six children. She was born in 1982.

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Jose and Enriqueta took advantage of the amnesty legislation of 1986 to become resident aliens.

The family moved to Fairmont City about eight years ago.

Arcelia is married to a man who was here illegally. He had come here legally on a visa but stayed long after the visa expired. He was able to get a green card because he married a U.S. citizen.

So, how does Arcelia feel about illegal immigration? Does she think we need comprehensive reform that would include amnesty for people who are now here illegally?

No, she is very much against amnesty. For that matter, she doesn't think that somebody like her husband, who was here illegally, ought to be eligible for legal status just because he married a U.S. citizen. Speaking of citizenship, she does not agree with the notion of extending citizenship to all who are born here. If your parents are illegals, you're an illegal.

I asked if she thought her parents ought to be deported, or her husband, or if her own citizenship should be revoked.

No, she said. She does not think any of these things should be applied retroactively. "What's done is done," she said. So she and her parents and her husband are fine.

I was, I must say, taken aback by her ideas. On the other hand, she is a citizen by virtue of birth - same as me - and she has a right to voice her opinion. That's one reason so many people want to come here. Then, too, of course, there is the whole business of economics. People come here for work.

That's why her father came here. His father died, and when his mother became ill, she sold the cows. What is a ranch without cows?

Arcelia seemed surprised when I suggested that some people will think she is mean-spirited in that she does not think that illegals now should get the same opportunity her parents received. She said she is sympathetic toward illegals. She said that she has many relatives who are here illegally.

I asked her what she would do if she were in charge. She would give more work visas, she said.

That is a nice idea, but what if you give 1 million work visas and 2 million people apply? Won't we still have a problem with people coming to this country illegally? If you give unlimited visas, you might as well not have a border.

By the way, Arcelia said she supports the Arizona law, although she indicated that she might not understand it. I said I don't support it, but then again, I don't understand it, either.

"And we thought health care was confusing," said her boss.

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