

Get real, and get willing to get right with the law

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Body

SAN DIEGO

Last week's immigration marches in several of the country's largest cities were actually helpful. They showed that - despite the nativist sound bites on the far **right** - the answer to our immigration woes is no more likely to come from the radical left.

Speaking of nativist sound bites, there are commentators such as CNN's Lou Dobbs who are more part of the problem than part of the solution. Until late last week, Dobbs had been using his network's Web site to raise money for the "legal defense fund" of Hazleton, Pa., which banned landlords there from renting to illegal immigrants. After the New York-based National Institute for Latino Policy complained that Dobbs was "misusing the resources of CNN," the network abruptly deleted any mention of the fund from the site.

Forget misusing resources. The **real** problem with a solicitation like this is that it perpetuated the myth that the good people of Hazleton needed defending from a problem they helped create by hiring illegal immigrants to do their chores. The townspeople need to take responsibility.

Trouble is, the marchers seem no more **willing** to accept their share of responsibility, either. Most of the comments I heard and read last week from the participants were arrogant, outrageous, presumptuous and reflected badly on the entire legalization movement.

And I say that as someone who has come around to the view that immigration reform must include a path to legal status for illegal immigrants. For many of the marchers, that path should be a carefree stroll in the park. If I had my way, it would be more like boot camp.

Look, these people made a choice. They broke the rules and came to the United States illegally. Now they have to pay for it by making restitution and making an effort to become part of the American fabric.

That's why I like the outline of the immigration reform plan being pounded out by the White House and GOP senators, as well as the immigration bill proposed by Reps. Jeff Flake, R-Ariz., and Luis Gutierrez, D-Ill. And it's why I've been a fan of the Hutchison-Pence plan, which was proposed last year by Rep. Mike Pence, R-Ind., and Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison, R-Texas. All of these proposals include a path of legalization, but with lots of conditions. Illegal immigrants have to pay fines, or learn English, or even return home for a short time. The message is clear: "You want the **right** to live in the United States legally? Fine. Earn it. Nothing valuable comes easy, and the **right** to live legally in the greatest country on Earth is of tremendous value."

No dice, said some of the marchers. One man in Los Angeles told television reporters that he demanded a "general amnesty without conditions just like in 1986." And forget that business about requiring people to leave the country and reapply to enter legally. No way was he going to do that, he said.

What a jerk. Here he is **getting** a gift, and he wants it wrapped with a bow. Heaven forbid, he'd have to lift a finger.

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Another man, also in Los Angeles, acknowledged that he was here illegally and explained his demands this way: "We want legal status so we can have the same rights as other people do."

There is his mistake. It's likely that the "other people" he is talking about are either permanent residents or U.S. citizens. If he wants the rights they have, let him go through the steps on his own to obtain either status. Then he can have rights galore, but with responsibilities the way "other people do."

Then there is the old standby, those signs with the slogan: "No human being is illegal."

OK. But human beings do, on occasion, commit acts that are illegal, and, when they do, they have to pay for those mistakes. And step one is admitting they made them.

Many of the more vocal illegal immigrants don't even want to do that much. Maybe they're embarrassed for having broken the law, and so they prefer to think about everything they've done right since they got here - raising good kids, starting businesses, paying taxes.

Aside from the nativists and the media charlatans, a lot of Americans accept that illegal immigrants have made a contribution. Why else would more than three-fourths of respondents to a recent USA Today/Gallup poll say that illegal immigrants ought to have a path to legal status?

This is close to being a done deal. But to seal it, illegal immigrants and those who presume to speak for them are going to have to get real and express a willingness to get right with the law. They need to accommodate America instead of demanding that America accommodate them.

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