

Siding Against the Law-Abiding

The Washington Post

May 25, 2003 Sunday, Final Edition

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Section: EDITORIAL; HOW I SEE IT MELANIE SCARBOROUGH; Pg. B08

Length: 734 words

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Body

Virginia Gov. Mark R. Warner (D) recently vetoed legislation that would have prohibited in-state discounts on college tuition for people who are in this country illegally. Noting that state regulations deny the benefit already (although some colleges ignore the regulation), Warner pronounced the measure a ploy "to score a political victory against 'illegal aliens.' " At the same time, Warner rejected the suggestion of Del. Phillip Hamilton (R-Newport News) to extend in-state tuition rates to dependents of military personnel stationed in Virginia who have legal residency elsewhere.

Hmm. Advocates for illegal immigrants generally vote Democratic; members of the military tend to vote Republican. Exactly who is more intent on scoring a political victory?

Illegal immigration is an intractable problem because it can be neither discussed nor addressed. To mention its detriments invites accusations of xenophobia and racism.

Certainly, everyone sympathizes with the huddled masses yearning to breathe free. But pretending it is immaterial whether immigrants are here legally or illegally is to pretend that the invited guest is no different from the trespasser. Is Warner unable to discern the difference, or does he find it more politic to turn a blind eye?

Although illegal immigrants typically are hard workers, they still place a burden on taxpayers. As part of the underground economy, they often avoid payroll taxes. Moreover, much of what they earn isn't recycled locally but is instead sent back to their native countries. The San Francisco Chronicle reported that illegal immigrants in the United States send \$ 23 billion to other countries each year.

Meanwhile, Virginia spends more than \$ 4 million annually paying their medical bills and more than \$ 60 million educating their children. According to the Federation for American Immigration Reform, incarcerating criminal noncitizens in the commonwealth's prisons cost taxpayers between \$ 8 million and \$ 10 million last year.

The price of coming to the United States can be even higher for the illegal immigrants themselves. Human smugglers charge stiff fees and subject their clients to extreme danger; many illegal immigrants have suffocated while being transported hidden inside boxcars and trucks. The Red Cross estimates that every other day a Central American trying to jump aboard a train bound for the United States loses a limb. A University of Houston study of migrants detained by immigration officials in Texas found that one in six females reported being raped while trying to reach this country.

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Even if illegal immigrants could get to this country safely and become self-supporting, how does it benefit Virginia to provide them with a college education?

It is against the law to hire them, so we are educating the unemployable. Illegal immigrants cannot vote, so they don't contribute to an informed electorate. The principal argument for allowing illegal immigrants to remain in this country is that the economy depends on their services: They will do menial work that Americans won't do. If so, why do they need a college education to change sheets, tend parking garages, drive taxis or wash cars?

Offering subsidies that yield no reciprocal benefits reflects civic generosity, but government policy should have more substantial bases than "it's nice to share."

Imagine how Lubomir Chocholak must feel. Earlier this year, a federal court in Norfolk sentenced him to 27 months in prison for hiring illegal immigrants. Because he turned a blind eye to immigration status, Chocholak was sent to the jug. Some of Virginia's college administrators do the same thing but boast of their benefaction.

Honorable people may disagree about this nation's immigration laws -- e.g., is it prudent to allow visitors from countries that sponsor terrorism? How many of the world's 6 billion people can the United States accommodate? But to implicitly support illegal immigration is to side against the law-abiding, and that is an unseemly position for a Virginia governor to take.

If Warner opposes existing immigration laws, he can work to change them. Regardless, he is obligated to ensure that Virginia complies with federal statutes. But there is little chance he will press for compliance, because that means protecting taxpayers' interests.

And that is not how Democrats score political victories.

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Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Document-Type: LETTER

Publication-Type: Newspaper

Subject: IMMIGRATION (91%); ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS (90%); TAXES & TAXATION (90%); IMMIGRATION LAW (89%); TUITION FEES (89%); US REPUBLICAN PARTY (79%); CITIZENSHIP (78%); LEGISLATION (78%); VETO (78%); SMUGGLING (77%); POLITICAL PARTIES (76%); POLITICAL DETAINEES (76%); ALIEN SMUGGLING (76%); MILITARY DEPENDENTS (75%); RACE & ETHNICITY (74%); RACISM & XENOPHOBIA (74%); ARMED FORCES (70%); UNOFFICIAL ECONOMY (70%); CORRECTIONS (67%); JAIL SENTENCING (67%)

Industry: MILITARY DEPENDENTS (75%); ARMED FORCES (70%)

Person: MARK WARNER (79%)

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Geographic: HOUSTON, TX, USA (79%); VIRGINIA, USA (94%); TEXAS, USA (79%); UNITED STATES (94%); CENTRAL AMERICA (79%)

Load-Date: May 25, 2003

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