

Immigrants aren't destroying America

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Body

Despite what some would have you believe, **immigrants** are not **destroying** this nation.

Years ago, the same complaints were leveled against Irish, Italian, German, French and Scandinavian communities making their homes in Swede Hollow, Frogtown, Little Italy, Germantown and other ghettos across the country that are today prosperous and vibrant parts of their cities.

Go there and you'll be amazed at what a bunch of supposedly depraved brawling drunken criminals with their bizarre food and fashions can construct, given time. Why the fuss today over immigration?

On Feb. 12, more than 500 people marched in the cold on Lake Street in Minneapolis to protest Gov. Tim Pawlenty's legislative proposals on immigration. These proposals include tougher fines, enforcement and monitoring of people's citizenship status.

We'd even get a 10-person Illegal Immigration Enforcement Team whose sole job is to question, detain and arrest suspected illegal **immigrants**. That's more than 400 hours a week of the state conducting domestic surveillance and sting operations on suspected people and their co-workers, friends and families.

Minnesotans must beware, because these policies risk committing us to a state of unequal protections under the law.

In New York, Zhen Xing Jiang, a pregnant woman being deported, lost her twin fetuses in a miscarriage after immigration officials ignored her repeated cries for a doctor and was refused medical treatment at Kennedy Airport. Only after she lost her babies did officials do anything.

Will we see our fellow Minnesotans denied similar, basic access to human services?

It's all too easy to see a scenario where police responses vary based on the victim's citizenship status, even for legal resident aliens. People who need firefighters, law enforcers and others will become more reluctant to seek that help.

Our officers will be unable to give many the help they want to give. How soon before they have to fill out quota sheets of serving "citizens" to "non-citizens," whether those are legal resident aliens or not?

Because of non-reporting by fearful **immigrants**, Minnesotans won't fully understand what's really going on in our own state and we'll be unable to make informed decisions to help others achieve the **American** dream.

If a Hmong or Somali family has an elder whose visa has lapsed by accident, will they call the police if there's been a violent break-in or they've been vandalized by racists? Will people let their houses burn, rather than risk the slightest possibility of deportation?

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There is an undercurrent of racism inherent in proposals, whether the governor is aware of it or not. If these measures are passed, I hope we see equal enforcement on illegal immigrants from Canada. How can we continue to let undocumented Canadians contribute to our society, since illegal immigrants are such a disruptive, destructive lot?

We haven't yet descended to the point of people having to wear color-coded symbols such as stars and triangles to denote their social status, but today, our policies must be given more deliberate consideration.

Immigration and lives as refugees isn't easy. There are many ways to fall through the system, even accidentally. Many elements of Pawlenty's current plan makes life harder not only for illegal immigrants but legal immigrants as well.

On St. Paul's University Avenue, which goes by the Capitol where the governor works, we see a street revitalized by immigrants. No one wants a return to the rampant prostitution, drug running and economic depression of old. We became a greater state from the immigrants among us, not worse.

With any new community among us, there will be bumps. But there are also successes, and in light of these successes, our legislators across Minnesota need to remember: Courage comes from promoting policies that creates greater success for all, not those that foment fear for expediency.

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