

Opinion: Changing 14th Amendment won't solve immigration crisis

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Body

Like most Americans, I am a descendant of immigrants and a grateful beneficiary of the opportunities available to our nation's citizens. My grandparents emigrated from Mexico in the early 20th century seeking a better life, and they found it working in the fields and dairy farms of Texas. Diversity is one of the great strengths of the United States -- diversity fueled by the migration of ethnicities, cultures and ideas.

Today, however, there is virtually universal agreement that our **immigration** process is broken. While security on our southern border has improved in the past decade, it remains inadequate in a post-9/11 world. Many employers hire undocumented workers with little concern about prosecution. Thousands of people cross our borders illegally believing they will not be arrested, expecting instead to receive benefits and, eventually, amnesty.

Based on what I have observed, most illegal immigrants come to America to provide for their families, and by most accounts, they contribute to our economy. Nevertheless, we are a nation of laws. When people break the law with impunity, it encourages further disobedience.

Some have expressed a desire to amend the **14th Amendment** of our Constitution to discourage undocumented mothers from crossing our borders to give birth to children derogatorily referred to as "anchor babies," who by law are American citizens. I do not support such an **amendment**. Based on principles from my tenure as a judge, I think constitutional **amendments** should be reserved for extraordinary circumstances that we cannot address effectively through legislation or regulation.

As the nation's former chief law enforcement officer and a citizen who believes in the rule of law, I cannot condone anyone coming into this country illegally. However, as a father who wants the best for my own children, I understand why these parents risk coming to America -- especially when there is little fear of prosecution.

We need a new **immigration** policy that complements our national security policy as well as our economic policy. In a post-9/11 world, we must know who is coming into this country and why -- we cannot have true security if we do not secure our borders. Our policy should reinforce respect for the law through effective enforcement that includes a streamlined deportation process and tougher penalties on employers that hire undocumented workers. It will take courage to pass meaningful legislation, but to do less or to take shortcuts places our security at risk. Americans expect and deserve better of their leaders in Washington.

Alberto Gonzales served as White House counsel and U.S. attorney general in the George W. Bush administration. He is currently a professor of political science at Texas Tech University. He wrote this article for the Washington Post.

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