

Cities Setting Own Immigration Rules

Washingtonpost.com

April 10, 2007 Tuesday 2:00 PM EST

Copyright 2007 Washingtonpost.Newsweek Interactive All Rights Reserved

washingtonpost.com

Section: LIVEONLINE

Length: 3806 words

Byline: Anthony Faiola, Washington Post Staff Writerwashingtonpost.com

Highlight: In the aftermath of a series of raids in 2004, the Hightstown, N.J., town council unanimously approved a sort of immigrant bill of rights. Joining a growing list of **cities** enacting a no-questions-asked policy on **immigration** status, Hightstown now allows its undocumented residents to officially interact with local police and access **city** services without fear of being reported to federal authorities.

Body

In the aftermath of a series of raids in 2004, the Hightstown, N.J., town council unanimously approved a sort of immigrant bill of rights. Joining a growing list of **cities** enacting a no-questions-asked policy on **immigration** status, Hightstown now allows its undocumented residents to officially interact with local police and access **city** services without fear of being reported to federal authorities.

On the other side of the debate, Hazleton, Pa., last year passed the Illegal **Immigration** Relief Act -- being challenged in federal court -- which denies licenses to businesses that employ illegal immigrants, fines landlords \$1,000 for each illegal immigrant discovered renting their properties and requires that **city** documents be in English only.

Washington Post staff writer Anthony Faiola was online Tuesday, April 10 at 2 p.m. ET to discuss the trend of **cities** **setting** their **own rules** regarding illegal immigrants, either creating a safe haven for them or denying them basic services.

The transcript follows.

Looking the Other Way on Immigrants (Post, April 10)

Anthony Faiola: Thanks all for joining this chat; we're dealing with a topic that has lots of heated opinions on both sides. So let's go ahead and start hearing some of them...

Funny: I couldn't help noticing that all of the "sanctuary **cities**" you write about happen to be Ivy League college towns -- meanwhile the **cities** going in the other direction are all blue-collar. Hmm ... so lets see. Politically dominant location full of trust fund kiddies and inheritor class folk who only stand to gain from cheapo labor, and have nothing to lose ... "sanctuary **city**"! Reverse the demographics, and you get the reverse. What an utter

Cities Setting Own Immigration Rules

shocker. I couldn't help but notice you didn't interview the lowly union locals or other peons in the rarified air of Hew Haven to get their take.

Anthony Faiola: Thanks for the question and comment. Actually, [cities](#) including Los Angeles and Portland also consider themselves to be sanctuary [cities](#) to some extent. So it's not just the "blue [cities](#)" but the trend certainly seems more common in liberal states.

Moved out of St. Louis: I moved out of my hometown of St. Louis last year. There is a suburb of St. Louis named Valley Park that enacted some laws to keep immigrants out of apartments, business, etc. Trust me -- there were very few Hispanics living in the entire metro area, much less Valley Park. Sure, there were many Vietnamese, for instance, in a certain area of St. Louis, but very few Hispanics. The laws were enacted to satisfy people that are scared and racist -- Valley Park was a lower-middle-class to working-class community for many years, so I guess they are trying to improve their image or whatever.

My husband and I are living in a relatively small community (300,000) in the southeast. New homes in our subdivision are being built by Hispanic men. I am sure our home was built by Hispanic men. Our grocery stores have many sections dedicated to the preferred foods of Hispanic people. Businesses tout their bilingual capabilities. My husband and I think it is a riot that some community in the southeast is more accepting of Hispanics than some old river [city](#) in the Midwest that had a very small Hispanic population. Sure, nobody wants crime, petty thefts, lower property values and other problems that we associate with "poor" and uneducated people, but this country was built on the immigrant experience. We should try to remember that.

Anthony Faiola: Interesting comments I wanted all here to see...

Houston: Thanks for writing such a heartwarming piece about a [city](#) that recognizes the value these workers add to society. The border crossing (or overstayed visa) may be the only illegal act these people ever commit. They come here looking for a better life for their families and just want to contribute. Why do you think the debate is so focused on Spanish-speaking immigrants? There are so many African, Irish, British, Canadian, Chinese, etc. immigrants who have come here illegally (or stayed illegally), but no one profiles them. This debate has become so polarizing that it makes me wonder if we're returning to the days of internment camps for the "others" that society doesn't know how to handle.

Anthony Faiola: Thanks for the question and comments. You raise a great point -- the debate is very centered on Hispanics, while Asians, Africans and others are typically underplayed. My sense is that this is largely due to numbers. Hispanics tend to make up the largest and most organized immigrant pools, which is one reason we see them so highly focused on.

Washington: Historically, during previous waves of [immigration](#), it happened far enough apart to integrate them (meaning English, American customs, etc.). This isn't the case this time, and by not slowing it down to help people assimilate we are creating a permanent underclass. Plus, the debate is being poisoned by terms like "racists." The fact is the rampant illegal [immigration](#) has flooded and bankrupted schools and hospitals and has overcrowded prisons (in some areas worse than others). Taxpayers, like the residents in that town in Pennsylvania, are sick and tired of having their tax dollars go to services for people who don't pay taxes or are illegal, not to mention the crime, gangs and health issues. I am not saying kick everyone out, but we need to get a handle on the flow before offering citizenship.

Anthony Faiola: Thanks for your question. You raise valid points here about the harm that can come to some communities. In others, like Hightstown, N.J., however, the mayor of the town and many others have said just the

Cities Setting Own Immigration Rules

opposite - that the influx of Hispanics helped new businesses thrive and pumped in some new life there. Certainly that isn't always the case, but it's worth considering.

New York: In a city of immigrants (illegal), why do I feel comfortable granting amnesty to some and not to others? Because some immigrants completely embrace America, her culture and language, but some don't. Why is it that I can communicate with Romanian, Ukrainian, Polish, Nigerian, Bangladeshi and Chinese immigrants, but I can't with Mexican and South American ones? Immigrants south of the border brought this intensity on themselves, so I support any ordinance to make sure they are deported. Why is it not okay to allow some immigrants to stay and some to leave? "It's not fair" is not an argument!

Anthony Faiola: Welcome from our reader New York -- where I'm also based for The Post.

You raise a fascinating point. Some have claimed that the core problem is assimilation -- or the lack of it. That Spanish-speakers have less incentive, than, say, a Polish immigrant to operate in the English-speaking world of America because Spanish is so prevalent here.

New York: Good afternoon Mr. Faiola. I find the illegal immigration debate conflicting as moderate Democrat whose parents legally immigrated to the U.S. in the 1970s. Because my family has achieved the "American dream," I certainly can sympathize with individuals' desire to escape countries with poor economic/political conditions. However, illegal immigrants don't pay income tax and often send money out of the country. Initiatives like these cost money. How are cities like Hightstown paying for these services, and what kind of support do they receive from the larger community?

Anthony Faiola: Another great question from New York. In fact, in Hightstown and many other cities, immigrant advocates argue that the undocumented aliens often do pay taxes. Some of them have false social security numbers, paying into a system they may never be able to draw out of. Others are paying in different ways -- through sales taxes etc. But certainly this isn't monitored closely and one can't quibble with your uneasy feelings on this.

Severn, Md.: Is the immigration debate as much to do about racism as anything else? Latinos are the "invisible" class of this society. When we talk about racism, it is in terms of black vs. white, but Latinos are the largest minority in the U.S. They seem to be invisible in any discussion on race. CNN did a show on racism, PBS a documentary on WWII, and both shows failed to mention or provide a Latino component to its program. It's wrong to do racial profiling on blacks, but racial profiling is permitted by police, financial and educational institutions, health groups and governments on latinos because they are Hispanic and the majority of illegals are Hispanic. A poll tax, voter tests, and the provision of identification to vote were debated and found unconstitutional because they discriminated unfairly on poor or illiterate blacks. However, drivers license citizenship requirements are geared not toward terrorism, but towards terrorizing Hispanics to prevent them from residing in a state or easily finding work. It is time that racism toward latinos be approached when discussing motives towards immigration. Americans romanticize the Italian, Polish and Irish immigrations in movies and culture. It seems ironic that these immigrants are white!

Anthony Faiola: Thanks for the comments -- now here for all to see.

New York: My family came to this America legally from Spain 100 years ago via Cuba. I grew up in Miami, where thousands of kids had to endure a bilingual education system that kept the Cuban people down. Today things are different because most Cubans have come to grips with balancing their culture with being American. It is this process that has created great minds like JFK, Al Smith and Jacob Javits. Why do you think legal immigration and patriotism is a bad thing?

Cities Setting Own Immigration Rules

Anthony Faiola: My sense is that many people do realize that legal immigration is a plus for this country; the issue becomes hot because most immigration flows today are coming in illegally. This is why you have such a major debate on going not only in Washington, but also across Main Street America.

Assimilation vs. temporary worker: There also is an issue that many illegal immigrants from Latin America are not here to assimilate, but rather to accumulate a nest egg and eventually go back home -- or at least, that's what they tell themselves when they first arrive. The reality four years later may be a different matter. Would a guest worker program be a realistic alternative?

Anthony Faiola: Thanks much for your question. The guest worker issue is currently a hot topic in Washington with President Bush relaunching the idea. Some feel this is one way to handle it; but others are saying allowing guest workers in -- and only guest workers -- would separate them from their families and effectively create a lower grade caste system in America.

Dayton, Ohio: I'm struck by a quote from one of the robbery victims, Julio "... at least I didn't feel like I was the one who committed a crime." But Julio, you did! Of course you're entitled to equal protection, regardless of how you got here, but if you broke the law to get in, at some point you're going to have to face the consequences. Otherwise we're looking at anarchy.

Anthony Faiola: Dayton -- interestingly put. I think the issue for a community like Hightstown is that they see the undocumented immigrants there as members of their community, no matter how they got there. They aren't saying Julio is in the country legally, but they are saying that immigration control should be left to the feds.

Hightstown, N.J.: I was thrilled to see the article about my town in The Washington Post online, which I read everyday. I am very proud of the position Hightstown is taking with regard to the newest residents. The immigrants may have an illegal status with regard to our immigration laws, but they are taxpayers, and the ones who own houses in our community are taxpayers, too. We are a very-low-crime borough, and I am proud of the way our police interact with all the residents of our borough. Our Mayor and Council are seeking ways for us all to live together in harmony. For those who consider us a la-di-da suburb of an Ivy League town (Princeton), I assure you that we always have been a borough of people of mixed incomes and societal status. What I am most proud of, I guess, is that we treat our newest residents as fellow human beings, not "aliens."

Anthony Faiola: I thought everyone would benefit from reading these comments from the source of today's story. That's for your thoughtful words, Hightstown.

Arrggghhh! "it's not just the "blue cities": Please don't pretend this is ideological. I made that comment and I'm a liberal, in many ways a radical. The point is class. In my experience -- and your article showed the same -- if the politically dominant class is the inheritor crowd, you get a "sanctuary cities" mentality; if it's working class you get the reverse, regardless of ideology. Again, I wonder what a lowly peon competing with low-cost illegal labor in New Haven would have to say -- but you didn't interview any of them. All you have noted is people reflecting self-interest, not ideology. If your wages are bidded down and your job is at risk to low-cost labor, you oppose this. If you are in a noncompetitive field (funny how inheritor class gigs always seem to be in this clump, even when they easily could be offshored on merits) you only see bennies, so you love it. The ideological argument is just a distraction.

Anthony Faiola: Thanks for your comments. I can tell you that several business owners I spoke with in Hightstown indicated they had trouble finding workers willing to work in lower grade jobs until the immigration boom happened there in recent years. That may not be the case in every town, of course.

Cities Setting Own Immigration Rules

Re: New York's comment: The problem is assimilation also has to do with a stigma attached to Hispanic immigrants. I have a friend who is the highly-trained manager of major IT network who changed his name from Juan to Antonio to seem less Hispanic and more Spanish (as in Spain). I think the lack of incentive also has to do with avoiding the stigma as much as anything.

Anthony Faiola: Interesting. I wonder if your friend finds that people are treating him differently, particularly given that Antonio and Juan are both common names in Spain as well as Latin America. Most curious to know if he lies to people about where he is from, and whether that changes the way people view him.

Washington: What you first commenter was saying was that "blue-collar" **cities** -- and their workers and taxpayers - have been losing out greatly from liberal states and **cities** hiring cheap, immigrant labor. This is the crux of the problem ... U.S. "blue-collar" citizens losing good-paying (mostly construction) jobs to cheap, unskilled immigrant labor. Instead of hiring competent carpenters, plumbers, etc., construction companies have for years undercut their labor costs by hiring unskilled immigrant labor while skilled "blue-collar" U.S. workers can't find work. This undermines the American lifestyle.

Anthony Faiola: That's certainly one side of the coin. On the other hand, there are business owners out there who will tell you that it's very hard to find anyone these days willing to flip burgers for minimum wage inside pricey **cities** besides undocumented immigrants. If Americans demand cheap prices, then there must be a pool of cheap labor. Immigrants are providing that to some extent. Maybe too much? I think that's what the debate is all about.

Falls Church, Va.: I'm an immigrant who came to the U.S. legally, and my brother is applying to come to the U.S. legally. He's been waiting for more than ten years now. I think it's extremely unfair that people who stay in the U.S. illegally are being considered for amnesty while the rest of the legal applicants still are waiting.

Anthony Faiola: Thanks Falls Church. You make a very valid point.

Seattle: Republicans out West last fall largely ran on anti-immigrant platforms and spent a considerable amount of time accusing Democrats of being "soft on immigrants." Why should the Democrats now work with Bush on an **immigration** policy about which Bush's **own** party spent months trashing Democrats?

Anthony Faiola: Thanks much for you comments. I think the answer to that question is that if Washington is going to reach any sort of consensus on this issue, the two parties need to work together. Otherwise, there will be more deadlock -- something I find that most people on both sides of the fence are tired of.

Lyon, France: In France, people have chosen to "look the other way" for decades. Now France is being destroyed by an overwhelmed welfare system, not to mention crime and terrorism. Do you see this happening in America?

Anthony Faiola: Thanks for tuning in from France. Curious to know whether French **cities** are taking the **immigration** debate into their **own** hands too?

Dayton, Ohio: What about the "broken-windows" theory? The local authorities deliberately are ignoring one section of criminal activity -- could this provide an atmosphere where more and more law enforcement is eroded away?

Cities Setting Own Immigration Rules

Anthony Faiola: Thanks for the question. In **cities** like Hightstown, Trenton, New Haven, Newark and others that have adopted these types of laws, police officials insist that such measures have actually helped them reduce crime by opening up channels of communication with the immigrant community. But certainly we'd have to take a more detailed look at the issue to say for sure.

Pittsburgh: Should Bush get the amnesty he wants -- and yes, it's amnesty -- for this 12 million, where does it end? And most importantly -- who pays for health care, schools, services and entitlements commonly available to low-wage workers? I barely am hanging on financially, but I'm not entitled to any "help" from my government. So, what is the cost to the taxpayer estimated to be should all these people become citizens?

Anthony Faiola: Pittsburgh -- thanks for the comment/question. Certainly one can understand your frustration. I think those who support a kind of amnesty for immigrants would argue that making them legal would force them to pay taxes in the same manner as other Americans, thus creating a greater accountable source of revenue for federal, state and local governments.

Florida: The **cities** that are denying business licenses to employers of illegals are well within their rights. If you focus on the word "illegal," you can see that a business buying stolen goods, or selling crack, or whatever, also is dealing in illegality. FYI: Another reason for the greater "acceptance" of non-Hispanic immigrants (besides language skills) is that most of the people who have entered the country illegally (as opposed to entering legally, then staying too long) have done so across the porous Mexican border. We get a few boats every now and then here in Florida, but most of our illegals are tracked to have come here on I-10 from Texas.

Anthony Faiola: Thanks Florida - here's your comments posted. I lived in Miami for almost a decade, and in other parts of Florida for several more years. Because the influx of Cubans received special **immigration** status due to Fidel Castro, your issue with undocumented residents is somewhat special.

Cheap labor?: Isn't the use of cheap illegal immigrant labor here in the U.S. just analogous to the outsourcing of service and manufacturing jobs to third-world countries? Seems like the reality is that big business wants to turn even greater profits -- and one way to achieve this is by paying illegals less, thus reducing the size of our middle class.

Anthony Faiola: Interesting point. But if Americans were willing to pay more for Big Macs or a cup of coffee, perhaps both the workers and the companies could do better. You are likely to find that in Western Europe and Japan, prices tend to be higher than in America -- but workers laboring in low scale jobs also tend to get better pay and benefits.

Washington: "My family came to this America legally from Spain 100 years ago via Cuba." There was no "legal" 100 years ago -- and for that matter, there hardly is today. For all the talk of "following the **rules**" and "waiting in line," I've yet to hear anyone actually describe what the **rules** are. So maybe you can help -- if I were an average Mexican with a small family and some education but not a lot, would it even be possible for me to legally **immigrate** to the U.S.? I am the child and grandchild of immigrants who did nothing in particular to "deserve" their chance at the American dream, and I am not convinced that we have created a fair standard for those who want a piece of that dream today.

Anthony Faiola: Thanks for your comments - here they are, posted for all to see.

Cities Setting Own Immigration Rules

Willing to work in lower-grade jobs: Sigh, more mythology. "Jobs Americans won't do" ... for peanuts. I'll bet none of those business owners mentioned ... oh, I don't know ... "paying more"? Nope. That might mean they take in less, and we all know that the ever-increasing disparity between the top 20 percent quintile and everyone else is good. Could we please at least be honest in our discussion?

Anthony Faiola: thanks for your comment. I certainly won't dispute the pull of corporate greed in all of this, but I also think - to stay honest - you need to ask yourself if you are really willing to pay more for products and services if it means giving the person behind the counter a better wage.

Anthony Faiola: We're winding down our hour here and time for me to get back to work. But a huge thank you to all who took part in this discussion today. Stay tuned for more on this important subject in the days and weeks to come - and feel free to message me through the Web site for more specific answers or suggestions.

washingtonpost.com:

Imus discussion: Can someone put the link under discussions for the Don Imus controversy topic? I know there was one at 1:00 or 2:00 today. Where is it? It's not under discussions or transcripts or schedule?

washingtonpost.com: Eugene Robinson fielded the questions about Imus for us today, following this morning's column on the topic. Here's the link.

Editor's Note: washingtonpost.com moderators retain editorial control over Live Online discussions and choose the most relevant questions for guests and hosts; guests and hosts can decline to answer questions. washingtonpost.com is not responsible for any content posted by third parties.

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Publication-Type: Web Publication

Subject: IMMIGRATION (92%); ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS (91%); CITIES (90%); TRENDS (89%); CITY GOVERNMENT (78%); LEGISLATION (78%); LEGISLATIVE BODIES (78%); IMMIGRATION LAW (78%); RACISM & XENOPHOBIA (78%); FEDERAL INVESTIGATIONS (78%); SPECIAL INVESTIGATIVE FORCES (77%); INTERVIEWS (76%); LITIGATION (76%); TRUST ARRANGEMENTS (74%); REGIONAL & LOCAL GOVERNMENTS (73%); LIBERALISM (73%); POLICE FORCES (72%); LAW COURTS & TRIBUNALS (70%); MIDDLE INCOME PERSONS (69%); WRITERS (69%); LABOR UNIONS (63%); EDITORIALS & OPINIONS (61%); COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES (50%); politics_nation17_6137

Industry: RENTAL PROPERTY (75%); WRITERS (69%); COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES (50%)

Geographic: PENNSYLVANIA, USA (79%)

Load-Date: May 23, 2007

Cities Setting Own Immigration Rules

End of Document