

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. To order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers visit <https://www.djreprints.com>.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/border-dilemmas-are-the-same-for-trump-or-obama-11575063189>

OPINION | BUSINESS WORLD

Border Dilemmas Are the Same for Trump or Obama

Two global news agencies withdraw a story when they realize it scandalized the wrong president.



By Holman W. Jenkins, Jr.

Nov. 29, 2019 4:33 pm ET



Migrants traveling to the U.S. in Tijuana, Mexico, Nov. 22, 2018. PHOTO: RODRIGO ABD/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Don't doubt the special iniquity of the current U.S.

administration when it comes to the problem of illegal immigration. Most of those turning up at our border and applying for refuge will surely be deported, insists the president's hardhearted official spokesman.

Oh wait. That was Obama spokesman Josh Earnest, referring in 2014 to unaccompanied minors showing up at the southern border: "It's unlikely that most of those kids will qualify. . . . They will be sent back."

Still, the current administration's fans gallingly argue that failing to deport immigration offenders will only encourage more to come: "There is nothing humanitarian in tacitly encouraging tens of thousands of children to risk their lives, often at the hands of cutthroat smugglers, to enter this country illegally."

Oh wait, that was the Washington Post editorializing in July 2014. As the paper went on to note approvingly: "During the past 14 years, under presidents Bush and Obama, the United States has sent more than 9,000 additional Border Patrol agents to the Southwest frontier, more than doubling the force there. It has built more than 600 miles of fencing; installed almost 12,000 underground sensors; and deployed scores of aircraft, drones and boats."

When you put it that way, Mr. Trump's wall sounds merely incremental.

All right, I admit I rescued this months-old column draft from my own discard pile in honor of a story killed last week by Reuters and Agence France-Presse. Both news agencies trumpeted a United Nations report that accused the U.S. of keeping 100,000 children in immigration detention, then quickly scrubbed the news from their sites when they noticed the fine print: The figures date from 2015 when Mr. Obama was president.

Mr. Trump may not be less cynical than other politicians, but he layers on less hypocrisy. This offends. But as others have done, he has sought to revive the principle that true refugees should seek asylum in the first safe country they come to (Mexico) rather than hopscotching through the options till they find a country they like. Like others, he has proposed detaining entire

families if necessary while pressing judges to examine their asylum applications more quickly.

All this is denounced as cruel but if successful would deter more from coming. Steve Bullock, governor of Montana and a former Democratic presidential candidate, spoke truthfully to a debate audience: “We’ve got 100,000 people showing up at the border right now. If we decriminalize entry, if we give health care to everyone, we’ll have multiples of that.”

Yes, and the cost will be measured partly in bodies. An average of 372 dead migrants a year were found along the southern border during Mr. Obama’s two terms. In Mr. Trump’s first two years, the average was 290. Don’t blame either man. Both had the same policy. It’s the same as Bill Clinton’s and George W. Bush’s: Don’t come. Don’t try it. Don’t risk dying in the desert or drowning or being raped and murdered by traffickers.

Alas, such words are hard to hear above the come-hither of our legal system: Go ahead, play roulette with your life. A loophole is waiting if you survive. So famous is our porousness that 8% of arrestees at the Mexican border are Asians and Africans, up from 1% a decade ago.

Let’s notice a couple of other things. When Americans commit felonies, they are separated from their children. U.S. prisons are home to 120,000 mothers of minor-age children, and 1.1 million fathers. When Americans fail to qualify for benefits, they don’t get the benefits—unlike asylum seekers who vanish inside the U.S. before their applications can be adjudicated and rejected.

How would I ameliorate the tragic dilemmas that come with our complicated Mexican border? Start by welcoming any migrant prepared to post a refundable \$5,000 border deposit. Overnight this would drain profits from the people traffickers. The money could be used to sponsor English instruction and other programs to help newcomers. By making the sum refundable, workers would receive an incentive to return home with their skills and capital to help their own countries.

There is no crisp solution that will satisfy all voter constituencies who, contrary to media cries of racism, are perfectly entitled to want a say on who comes and how many. Voters are not racist if they worry about MS-13, Ebola, competition for jobs and wages, or cultural change.

Let’s also recognize a megatrend. If economics has anything to say, the illegal immigrant of the future will more often be a skilled worker. The opportunities are here. Jobs are begging. A shortage of qualified workers has become a substantial factor holding back economic progress for the rest of us.