

OPINION



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Nation needs tighter border, more workers

Even a mismanaged surge of migrants isn't imposing a net financial burden on taxpayers

Cashes over immigration and control of the U.S. border have already figured prominently in the battle for the presidency. A better policy is certainly needed — one that admits far more workers with skills in short supply, restores an orderly process for accepting other economic migrants and asylum seekers, dissuades those who won't qualify from turning up at the border, and helps states and cities cope with the consequences of failing to get this right.

As the arguments continue, it would be good to keep one thing in mind: The vast majority of immigrants — including those arriving under the existing ill-suited arrangements — will prove to be national assets, not liabilities. On balance, they'll boost the economy and help mend the country's broken public finances. Though policy can and should be improved, the goal shouldn't be throttling the supply of foreign workers.

A recent report from the Congressional Budget Office looks at what it calls the recent "immigration surge" of people entering the U.S., not counting those with lawful-immigrant or temporary-worker status. The number of these irregular or "other foreign national" arrivals — people who entered the U.S. illegally or overstayed their temporary status, "parolees" awaiting court proceedings, those granted temporary protected status or "deferred action," and others — expanded enormously after 2020, from an average of about 200,000 a year to roughly 1.7 million a year.

The surge after 2020 is projected to add \$1.2 trillion to federal revenue over the next decade — about as much as raising all tax rates on personal income by 1 percentage point. This is mostly because in time the arrivals work and pay taxes, and because a bigger labor force boosts economic growth, adding to others' incomes and taxes. Gross domestic product goes up by \$9 trillion, thanks to the bigger population, higher labor-force participation among the arrivals and higher productivity. Federal spending is projected to rise by about \$300 billion as the arrivals and their children qualify for benefits.

The net effect is to cut 10-year federal borrowing by \$900 billion. States and cities will see revenue and outlays change, too, and the balance there is unlikely to be so benign. (The cost of schooling the arrivals' children falls mostly on states.) Still, it would be reasonable to conclude that, at worst, the surge imposes no net costs on U.S. taxpayers. And remember, this is the outcome for arrivals not selected for educational attainment or the skills most in need.

The failure to control the border, and the stress on local communities forced to cope with a disorderly influx of people, must be fixed. But the claim that even a mismanaged surge of migrants imposes a net financial burden on the economy and its taxpayers is false. The main lesson is that the gains from a better, smarter, well-managed pro-immigration policy would indeed be huge.

Back then, most of my friends tried to emulate Rose on the sandlot baseball fields of our youth — not his natural talent but his trademark hustle. We would run hard to each base, beat out ugly hits, dive for pop ups and give 110% on every play. He exemplified all the qualities of a hard-nosed, scrappy, win-at-all-costs baseball player, regardless of what position he played or if he batted left-handed or right-handed. He sacrificed his body for wins. He set records I thought no one could.

Though Rose retired in 1986, he continues to lead Major League Baseball in all-time hits (4,256), most games played (3,562), at-bats (14,053) and singles (3,215). He also was a 17-time All-Star, a three-time batting-title winner, Rookie of the Year and World Series MVP.

Imagine being a boy who loved baseball and worshipped Charlie Hustle throughout his adolescence. I watched every game of his I could. I studied his baseball card statistics. I was awed by his superiority even when he beat my beloved Chicago Cubs.

All of this changed in 1989 when Major League Baseball announced a "full inquiry into serious allegations" about Rose betting on pro baseball games while he was a player and manager of the Reds.

Rose was 48 and initially denied the allegations. I was 27 and crushed. This is when Charlie Hustle became a myth to me and Rose became mortal. A year later, Rose pleaded guilty to two charges of filing false income tax returns and served five months in prison.

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MY VIEW | GARY VARVEL



Helene cast a pall over the Blue Ridge Mountains

CAMDEN, S.C. — "Chill" is the word that comes to mind when thinking of Asheville, North Carolina, the center of Hurricane Helene's devastation last week. A hub for musicians, artists, writers, chefs, animal lovers and entrepreneurs nestled among the Blue Ridge Mountains at a temperate 2,134-foot elevation, Asheville today is bordering on a nervous breakdown.

So is the Southeast, generally. For generations, the Blue Ridge Mountains have provided a summer refuge for people from all around the Deep South. My family has been among the fortunate who could escape to higher climes during insufferably hot and humid summers. Mornings there were often cool enough to justify building a fire.

It seems almost everyone knows someone who lives in "the mountains" and nearly everybody else spends time there. We expect hurricanes and tropical storms to visit our coastline and Lowcountry, but who could have imagined that one could become a threat to towns hundreds of miles from the ocean?

Helene was a tropical storm by the time it reached the Carolinas, but it was still so big and so powerful that its lashing rain and winds reached South Carolina's Midlands, and people across the region are feeling the storm's pain.

When Mark Edens, a friend and part owner of a popular antiques store here in Camden, saw me the day after the storm, he skipped any greeting and went right to, "How bad are you hurting?" His despair was palpable. "You know,

I physically live here," he said, "but my soul lives in the mountains. It was just too much. It broke me."

"Soul" is another word that fits the Blue Ridge. Something about the mountains nourishes the soul. It's the cooler air as you climb higher with each turn of the road. It's also the aroma of millions of trees that remind you of Christmas. Some might say when you're in the mountains, you're closer to the angels.

Asheville's fortunate location at the junction of two rivers, the French Broad and the Swannanoa, proved to be its undoing when Helene blew through and the waters rose to depths of massive destruction.

If there were an apocalyptic film named "Helene," the soundtrack would have to be Rhiannon Giddens's "Swannanoa Tunnel." The song, sometimes called "Asheville Junction," was first sung in the late 19th century to the sound of hammers pounding steel. It tells the story of the railroad tracks built by wrongfully imprisoned Black people who were labor for the Western North Carolina Railroad.

Towns along that rail line, including Swannanoa, Black Mountain, Ridgecrest and Old Fort, were almost completely destroyed by the storm. In Asheville, little was spared — certainly not the River Arts District, a mile-long oasis for artists and collectors that includes galleries for 240 artists and 23 converted warehouses offering art, food, music, breweries and what's understood as the Asheville vibe. Artsy, laid-back, cool and dog-friendly, it's a flannel-and-flip-flops mecca for hikers, mountain bikers, foodies and culture connoisseurs.

One of my favorite haunts was the Marquee, a 50,000-square-

foot emporium of fantasy and over-the-top sensory stimulation. Architectural elements, paintings, vintage furniture, jewelry, clothing, olive oil — it's all there. Or was.

In the immediate wake of the storm, the Asheville vibe was fully engaged, as neighbors and strangers helped one another by any means available. My son, John, who lives in Asheville, saw people going out of their way to share what others needed. But the novelty of shared catastrophe cannot last forever.

"A week later, now that so many have cleared out, the neighbors-helping-neighbors vibe has subsided somewhat," he texted me, "and it just feels like one of the bleakest places I've ever been." I asked him what the area smells like, because the mountains usually smell so fresh and clean.

"Mildew," he said. "It's not so much the smell as the ambience. It feels like a bomb went off. Very empty and quiet, except for the occasional siren or helicopter every 20 minutes or so." Businesses are closed, except the odd gas station or grocery store with lines outside. Many people are going without power and water.

It's hard to imagine how long it will take for the Blue Ridge to recover and rebuild. At least the birds are singing, John tells me. And the bears, who had been displaced by overdevelopment, are back to wandering the neighborhoods and downtown. John saw one walking down his street Thursday morning, probably scouting abandoned houses for leftovers.

Chill, it seems, isn't just for people. Let's hope it lasts.

Parker writes for The Washington Post.

I idolized Charlie Hustle but not mortal, flawed Rose

I was a huge fan of Charlie Hustle. Not so much of Pete Rose. The two personas were the same baseball player, but I separated them decades ago.

I idolized Charlie Hustle. I demonized Pete Rose. Maybe you did, too.

Rose died recently of natural causes for his age, 83. Since I heard the news, his complicated legacy has been circling the bases in my head. He was a childhood sports hero of mine whose off-the-field flaws forever tarnished his on-field excellence.

Should it matter with our sports heroes? As a kid growing up in the '70s, I watched Rose rise to superstardom with the Cincinnati Reds. I had baseball cards from his 1963 rookie season through his heyday.

Back then, most of my friends tried to emulate Rose on the sandlot baseball fields of our youth — not his natural talent but his trademark hustle. We would run hard to each base, beat out ugly hits, dive for pop ups and give 110% on every play. He exemplified all the qualities of a hard-nosed, scrappy, win-at-all-costs baseball player, regardless of what position he played or if he batted left-handed or right-handed. He sacrificed his body for wins. He set records I thought no one could.

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Other sports heroes have disappointed me. Their professional accomplishments were tainted by their personal mistakes. Babe Ruth, Walter Payton, Michael Jordan and Lance Armstrong first come to mind. I tried to separate

their athletic achievements from their bad habits, poor decisions and lack of integrity.

It's like separating a baseball from its seams. At some point, it unravels.

Rose's most crucial error in his career was gambling on baseball and then lying about it for years. It would cost him any future involvement in baseball and also induction into the Baseball Hall of Fame.

I always figured Rose would get inducted posthumously, a symbolic gesture by MLB to prove that cheaters, liars and illegal gamblers can't get into baseball heaven until they're dead. But, technically, a player on the permanently ineligible list can't be considered for election to the Hall.

Fans of the game disagree on whether Rose now deserves to be in the Hall of Fame. I recently drove past a building in Indiana with a large sign painted on its

side:

"Pete Rose 'Charlie Hustle' — Heaven Found, Cooperstown Bound. #LetHimIn."

Does he deserve the honor now? I say no. Rose was never able to outrun his infamous reputation like Charlie Hustle could do with a suicide squeeze play between third and home.

Twenty years ago, Rose finally admitted he bet on those games. Since then, he never scored the extra-inning runs needed to win his most elusive victory — induction into baseball eternity without an asterisk, without his darkest shadow following him into the grave.

For me, Rose has died but Charlie Hustle will forever live on. This is the timely reality of mortality and the timeless myth of baseball.

Davich writes for The Times of Northwest Indiana: Jerry.Davich@nwi.com.