

OPINION

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Abolishing ICE Isn't Radical — It's Rational

Agency has become a menace

BY FIZZ PERKAL

As someone who was born and raised in the border state of New Mexico, I'm very familiar with political speak about immigrants and the border, especially when it comes to talking about safety.

After 9/11, concerns about safety led to the passing of the Homeland Security Act, which created a new cabinet department as well as a new law enforcement agency: Immigration and Customs Enforcement, or ICE. ICE was given a never-before-seen level of criminal and civil authority — in theory, to keep Americans safe.

It's now the largest investigative



branch of the Homeland Security department. Unlike other law enforcement agencies like the FBI or DEA, ICE doesn't answer to the Department of Justice, which for decades has at least paid lip service to due process.

Far from being a law enforcement agency, ICE has become the closest thing we have to a lawless organization.

Rather than keeping Americans safe, the organization has become a menace, wasting taxpayer money while doing tremendous violence to communities that pose no threat.

From separating families to having 3-year-olds stand trial for deportation, and from staking out churches to stealing immigrants' identities to open up fraudulent credit cards, ICE embodies cruelty. More worrying still, people are dying in ICE custody at alarming rates.

In May, a transgender woman

from Honduras named Roxsana Hernandez died in ICE custody in New Mexico. Roxsana came to the United States seeking asylum from persecution and violence in her home country.

Rather than being treated with the dignity and respect befitting all humans, and particularly those seeking asylum, she was detained by ICE and held in a freezing cold cell with the lights turned on 24 hours a day. This approach to detention is so common it has a name — the icebox, because the cells feel as cold as a freezer.

As a queer, gender non-conforming New Mexican, this hit close to home for me. Not only did Roxsana come to this country because she wanted the safety to live her life as her authentic self, but she died in Albuquerque, my hometown. She died a terrifying and lonely death due to complications of pneumonia, likely caused

by the frigid conditions of her detention.

I have to say: Her death certainly doesn't make me any safer.

In another devastating case, Pablo Villavicencio, an undocumented man originally from Ecuador, was detained by ICE while he was delivering pizza to a military base in New York City. Pablo lives in New York with his wife and young children, all of whom are U.S. citizens. His detention and possible deportation certainly won't make me, or anyone else, any safer.

ICE was created to protect the U.S. from terrorism. But it seems the biggest threats they can identify are refugees and workers supporting their families. If you ask me, ICE is the one terrorizing people.

Unfortunately, ICE has become even more aggressive in the past 18 months — and not just against people from Mexico and Central

America. The number of Haitians deported rose from 300 in 2016 to 5,500 in 2017 — as if almost the entire city of Aspen, Colo. were deported. The rate of deportation for people from Somalia nearly doubled during the same time.

To what end?

At this point, ICE's targeting of families and non-threatening individuals makes it clear that it's beyond reform. Immigrants aren't threats to the nation's security — they're people, just like you and me, who are trying to make the best of their circumstances.

We need to find better ways to make sure our communities are safe without relying on a lawless, violent organization. It can't be that hard — we did it for centuries before the Homeland Security Act. ICE must be abolished.

Fizz Perkal is a Next Leader at the Institute for Policy Studies. Distributed by OtherWords.org.

An All-Out War on Kids, Not Just on the Border

What we're seeing part of a larger pattern

BY GEORGE GOEHL

Donald Trump's choice to separate migrant children from their parents has unleashed a flood of outrage across the political spectrum. While



the president has stepped back from separating families at the border, his solution is to imprison children with their parents, and change laws so he can hold them indefinitely.

Trump is a master of bait-and-switch: He distracts voters with tough-on-immigration politics, then sells out working families. Irreparable harm to thousands of children is a price he's willing to pay, if it helps him score political points.

While these hateful acts against children are Trump's most blatant to date, they're hardly the first. His policy agenda is a full-throated attack on children from poor and working class families.

What's happening at the border is part of a larger pattern: an all-out war on kids. Your children will feel the hurt of the Trump's agenda, too. Here are a just a few highlights.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program provides nutritional support to over 19 million children, or 1 in 4 kids in America.

The Farm Bill just passed by the House will reduce SNAP benefits for over 2 million people, including hundreds of thousands of children.

Children who participate in SNAP are less likely to be hospitalized, underweight, or at risk of developmental delays. Now they're at risk.

Meanwhile, Trump's Environmental Protection Agency administrator Scott Pruitt is dismantling programs that protect children from dangerous toxins that permanently damage cognitive ability.

Pruitt's decision to dissolve the National Center for Environmental Research makes it easier for big corporations to dump chemicals into our air and water and curbs our ability to document the impact toxins have on our children. Pruitt also rejected a ban on organophosphate pesticides — first developed as human nerve gas agents during World War II and proven to cause fetal brain damage.

Trump's housing secretary Ben Carson is also on the attack: Carson wants to triple the minimum rent that the poorest Americans pay for federally subsidized housing assistance, which would put nearly a million children at risk of homelessness.

Trump also wants to employ a rarely used budget maneuver called "rescission" to eliminate \$7 billion from the popular Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP).

This all constitutes a war on kids. If you're not part of Trump's family or the corporate class he works for, his agenda is bad for our children. Not just someone else's children — our children.

Each policy is likely to hurt the health and development of children of color in particular. Yet even as he fans racist fires to divide poor and working class communities, Trump is doling out pain to white kids as well. White families are the majority of residents in federally subsidized housing programs. The most likely person to be on Medicaid, the federally supported health care program for low-income families, is white.

So if children are losing, who wins? The wealthy corporate class wins. We were told Trump's \$1.5 trillion tax giveaway would create better jobs for everyday people. Instead, corporations have been 69 times more likely to buy their own stock than invest in better wages or benefits for their workers.

What we're witnessing at our border is one part of a war against all children — whether by cuts to schools, child nutrition, health care, safe air and water, or family-supporting jobs.

"You're fired!" is what the White House is saying to our children, our nation's future. And while brown migrant children are in the headlines this week, Trump is hoping we won't notice that all children are in his crosshairs, every day of the week.

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George Goehl is the director of People's Action. He leads a 30-state national effort to unite poor and working class people across race and place to challenge inequality, climate change, and racial division. Distributed by OtherWords.org.