

# OPINION

## The First Amendment

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition their Government for a redress of grievances.

## Guest Viewpoint

# On Independence, Immigration and Inhumanity

By Marshall Gause  
of Cottage Grove

In the July 3 publication of her weekly “Chatter Box” column in *The Sentinel*, Betty Kaiser made a good faith effort to learn more about immigration in America. I would like to respectfully continue the discussion.

The Declaration of Independence quite explicitly encouraged immigration, taking the King of England to task for his tyrannical efforts to thwart it. The document is essentially a list of the “Abuses and Usurpations” the authors felt King George III, referred to throughout as “HE”, had visited upon the colonies. Out of more than two dozen grievances, the seventh one listed makes it pretty plain, stating:

“HE has endeavored to prevent Population of the these States; for that Purpose obstructing the Laws of Naturalization of Foreigners, refusing to pass others to encourage their Migration hither, and raising the Conditions of New Appropriations of Lands.”

The signers of the Declaration wanted laws to encourage foreigners to migrate to America — full stop. In fact, over 1/7th of the signers of the Declaration were immigrants, most having been born in England, Ireland or Scotland, and brought to America as children. In addition, 1/6th of the signers were first generation residents of the colonies — “anchor babies,” if you will.

But of course, one of the reasons the signers encouraged immigrants to join them was because they had decidedly poor relations with the original inhabitants of America who they refer to in the Declaration as, “merciless Indian Savages.”

And while the Declaration is best known for the lofty assertion that “all men are created equal,” (“men” not women, mind you), 43 of the 56 signers were slave owners, men who actively forced people into, or maintained them in bondage, profiting from their labor and buying and selling them as property. These were people who weren’t even afforded the dignity of immigration, but instead came as cargo.

Slavery was the original family separation policy — children were taken from their parents; husbands and wives, brothers and sisters were torn apart never to see each other again.

If we want to celebrate the aspirations embodied in the American vision, we must also confront the violence, greed and hatred at the core of slavery and the centuries of racism and intolerance that have followed. We must confront the systemic dehumanization of people as “merciless savages” in our history and as “animals” — or an “infestation” in our present political culture. This history of hatred is part of our legacy, too. As is the capacity to allow such polices to persist and turn our immigration situation into a “mess” where inhuman practices can persist.

Some more facts to consider: According to the American Immigration Council, immigrants — even those that are unauthorized — are less likely than native-born persons to engage in crime. From 1990 to 2013, the share of the U.S. population that was foreign-born went from 7.9 percent to 13.1 percent while, during the same period, the FBI found that violent crime declined by 48 percent and property crime declined by 41 percent.

Despite this evidence, ICE is the second largest criminal investigation and enforcement agency in the U.S., only the FBI is larger. And yet ICE operates without accountability from the Department of Justice. Instead they are under the auspices of the Department of Homeland Security, an agency that has only existed since 2003 and represents one of the largest expansions of the federal government in decades.

ICE is the only U.S. criminal enforcement agency that has a bed quota. It is required by law to fill 34,000 beds with migrants every day at a cost to taxpayers of more than \$120 per detainee — or more than \$2 billion per year.

It needs to also be noted that arriving at a designated port of entry and requesting asylum from violence or oppression, as many migrants from countries like Honduras and Guatemala are doing, is not illegal immigration. In fact, is absolutely legal in accordance with U.S. and international laws governing asylum.

For over 30 years sociologists Douglas Massey and Jorge Durand have run the Mexican Migration Project, the most detailed database tracking Mexican immigration to and emigration from the U.S. The U.S. government uses it as its primary

source of data on the issue rather than the Border Patrol itself, whose data is notoriously unreliable.

In 2016 Massey and Durand published the results of a rigorously researched study called “Why Border Enforcement Backfired.” They found that between 1986 and 2010 the U.S. spent \$35 billion on border enforcement, but rather than decrease, undocumented migration doubled.

This is because for nearly a century, migration from Mexico was circular in nature. That is to say Mexican migrants, mostly men, would come to the U.S. for seasonal work and then return to Mexico for the winter months. As border enforcement increased, crossing became more dangerous, so rather than return, migrants would remain in the U.S.

Massey and Durand conclude that if the U.S. had maintained pre-1986 border enforcement policies, effectively doing nothing new and saved billions of dollars in taxpayer money, undocumented immigration would be a third lower than it is.

When I consider how we, as Americans, have allowed such an inhuman, inefficient and indefensible approach to immigration enforcement persist for so long, I am reminded of another passage from the Declaration of Independence:

“Mankind are more disposed to suffer, while Evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed.”

Have we grown so accustomed to suffering a violent, militaristic approach that we can’t let logic, compassion and tolerance guide us in all people’s pursuit of “Life, Liberty, and Happiness?” One final passage we all should know comes to mind, which reads: “Whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these Ends, it is the right of the People to alter or abolish it.”

Abolishing ICE, a sprawling, wasteful, and authoritarian overreach of federal power is a good place to start. But refusing to let others suffer Evils that we have the power to change, refusing to see others as less than human and refusing to succumb to hatred... those are the endless endeavors that our lives will be measured against.

Marshall Gause is a writer, musician, and farmer in Cottage Grove

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## LETTERS

### Clearcut Eyesore

The clear-cut hills north and east of town are such an eyesore. I thought Lane County wanted to attract local tourism, not drive it away. I know it is private land, but clear cuts increase the fire threat. I don’t want to have a Labor Day weekend anything like last year’s.

With the awful fires last year, this isn’t going to help because the ground gets dried up so badly. Selective logging promises more continuous, ongoing work and isn’t as destructive.

I have to ask: Is clearcutting the only option we got?

—Kerstin Britz  
Cottage Grove

### We are people first, citizens second

The light of American freedom does not end nor grow dim at America’s borders. In fact, it is at these physical boundaries we can increase in ourselves both the light of knowing freedom and the clarity of a conscience raised in freedom.

We can enjoy a deepening in both character and conscience at those physical boundaries precisely because it is at these physical boundaries that we not only must confront the legal domain of freedom, but we must also confront the arguments of those who think freedom is a privilege allocated to a precious few — and not a space created

by the promise of Life itself to all those who share the precious gift of life.

Do not think like a selfish person who has the habit of seeing every good thing that someone else has as having been stolen from their own plate.

Instead think like this: When we increase someone else’s good fortune we increase the sum total good fortune and goodwill of the world we all share.

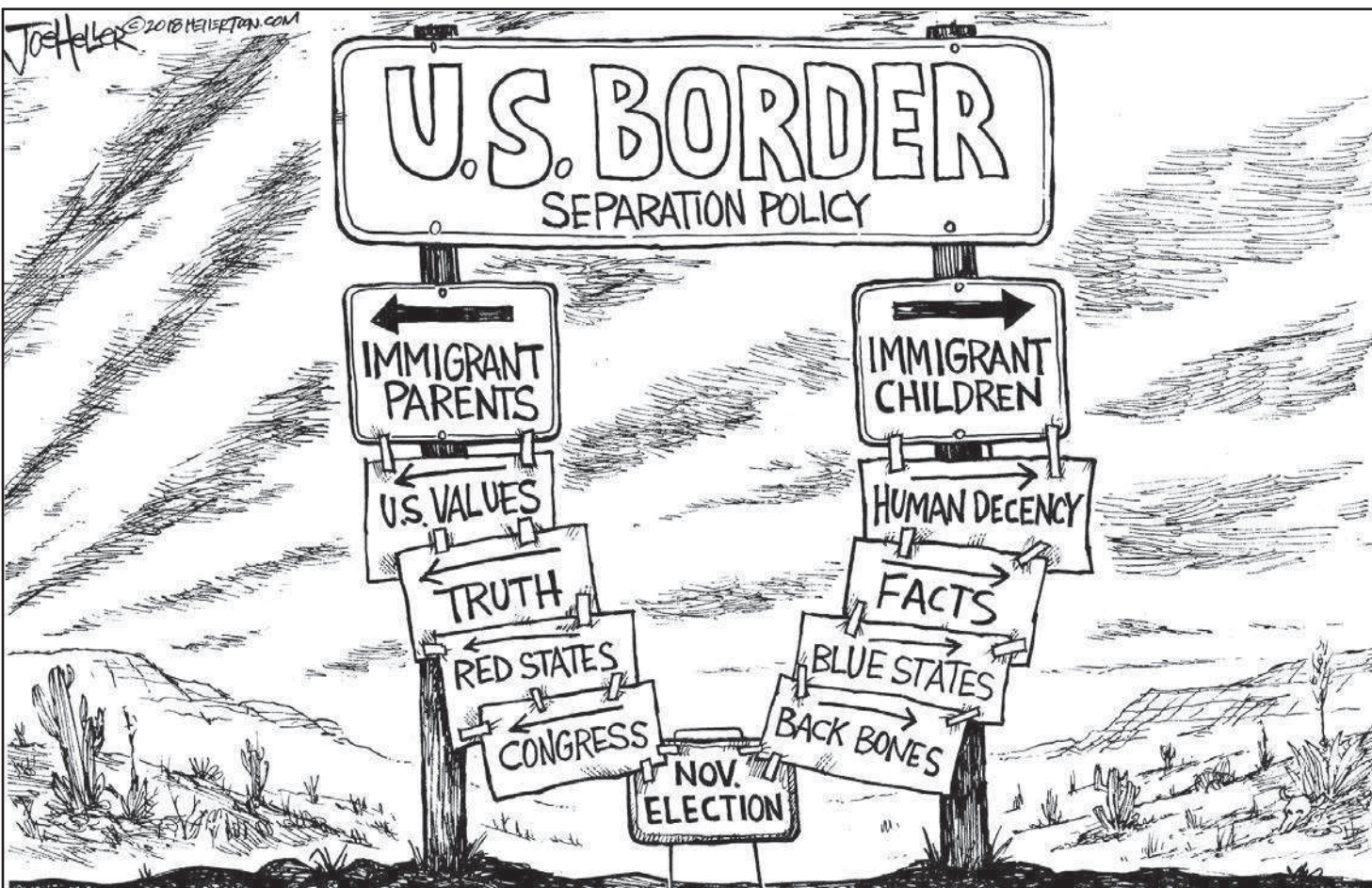
Allow me to quote from the first section of the 14th Amendment. After determining the nature of the citizenship of the United States of someone either born in the United States or become naturalized, the second sentence reads: “... Nor shall

any state deprive any person of life, liberty or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.”

I want to point out that this quoted text does not use the word “citizen,” but instead uses the word “person.”

I cannot help but believe that the discussion I opened this letter with indicates the best and most truly American context to interpret both the word *Person* and my quote from the 14th Amendment to The Constitution of the United States of America.

—Leo Rivers  
Cottage Grove



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