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Guest commentary: Top 10 ways we can help fix illegal immigration

By CASEY WOLFF, Special to the Daily News
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Casey Wolff is an immigration attorney with the Naples law firm of Paulich, Slack & Wolff, PA.

Let me pose a question: Can you trace your family tree to the Seminoles, the Iroquois or the Sioux? Answer: We are all immigrants.

Then why does this country, founded by immigrants, and the acknowledged world leader in international commerce, finance, technology, modern culture and democracy, continue to fear and stigmatize immigrants?

The obvious answers are Osama bin Laden, xenophobia, racism, nationalism and the "I Got Mine" syndrome (a Glen Frey song that could be the Naples national anthem). The less obvious answers are cultural diversity and the "minoritization" of the white Anglo-Saxon in 21st century America. The politically spun answers are threatened jobs, lower wages and welfare abuse.

I am not here to debate the "why" but to contribute to a solution.

Last month, this newspaper reported a number of midnight arrests of Haitians by immigration cops (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, aka ICE).

Across the country, ICE is chasing down over 400,000 absconders (aliens ordered deported who then disappeared) and 80,000 fugitive aliens who committed crimes.

Because Haitians are Florida's second-largest immigrant group, behind Cubans, it appears they are being singled out. Cubans are generally immune from deportation due to their extraordinary political strength in Washington. There is no evidence that Haitians are being singled out because all immigrants are currently being stigmatized by our current laws.

Let me pose several more questions: If homeland security is so important, why does Washington not attempt to identify the millions of illegal aliens who have been in the United States for years and thus isolate the "bad guys"? If illegal aliens receive welfare benefits, why will the Internal Revenue Service *not* allow them to pay taxes? If illegal aliens cannot get real Social Security numbers, what happens to the \$80 billion (2001 figure) paid by illegals using false Social Security numbers? If immigration is stopped, who will work to pay for my Social Security benefits?

If illegal aliens cannot get driver licenses, do we really want millions of uninsured drivers on the road? (Incidentally, this is to prevent using licenses to board airplanes. Illegals will continue to drive as they must make a living. Anyone can board an airplane with a passport.)

Our immigration laws are broken.

The sleight of hand that created the Department of Homeland Security did nothing to legalize illegals. Some 8 million to 12 million illegal immigrants (current estimates) still live here, work here, have kids in school here

and are not leaving because this is home. Can this mess be solved?

My "David Letterman Top 10 List for Fixing Illegal Immigration" is:

10. To fix something, admit it is broken. See every published article on immigration reform since the special report by the late Rep. Barbara Jordan in the 1980s.

9. Use the carrot, not the stick. Millions of illegals cannot be put in jail!

The United States already imprisons 2 million of its citizens, second only to China worldwide. Prison is for criminals, not illegals.

8. Identify illegal aliens, don't hide them. Allow aliens to get IDs, licenses or other forms of identification so we know who is in the United States. Who benefits by driving them underground?

7. Let illegals pay taxes. This is a no-brainer. If you work, you pay.

6. Let illegals pay into Medicare. See No. 4.

5. Give qualifying illegals a chance to get legal. Since April 2001, there has been no way for illegals to get legal in the United States. See the SOLVE legislation currently proposed in Congress.

4. Retirees, be greedy: Acknowledge that the United States needs immigration. The U.S. working population needs 1 million immigrants per year to keep Social Security funded. Picture Florida's agricultural, hotel, resort, restaurant, hospital, recreation, construction, service and retail businesses without immigrants.

3. Stop believing talk radio and listen to the President's Council of Economic Advisers. In 2002, the council estimated that immigrants contribute a net annual gain to the economy of \$14 billion.

2. Talk to your ancestors. They were immigrants too.

1. Give the children of illegals a chance. They did not choose to come to the United States illegally but are being punished. See the Tallahassee initiative on education and the DREAM Act in Congress.

Illegal immigration is a fixable problem. Politicians who spin fear, racism and intolerance will not help. The business community, the retirees, the fiscally responsible, those concerned about homeland security and those who have actually visited the Statue of Liberty can solve the problem.

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