



Other Viewpoints

Remember the face of immigration

It is easy to classify illegal immigrants as unwanted law-breakers when you don't know any of them. And it is easy to say they are taking jobs that American citizens would take if you haven't worked one of those jobs or lived in parts of the country that depend on immigrant labor.

A two-part series in the *Hutchinson News* over the weekend puts a human face on the immigration issue in Kansas.

Meet Bertha Mendoza, who came from Mexico legally by being one of the lucky few to get a visa 25 years ago and today is living the American dream, having become a citizen, earned a master's degree and now working for Kansas State University Research and Extension's human nutrition program in Garden City.

Most illegal immigrants, Mendoza explains, are "honest, responsible and hard-working people who come to this country in search of the opportunity of a better quality of life for themselves and their families."

And then meet Jorge Herrera, who, fearing he couldn't support his new family in Mexico, paid a coyote \$400 in 1994 to get his wife and six-month-old infant son across the border in 1994. Today, he is the patriarch of a mixed-status family with four younger children, all citizens of the U.S.

He became skilled at concrete work, and his employer promoted him to concrete foreman when he couldn't find anyone else. Herrera and his wife now are working toward citizenship, and that infant who was strapped to his mother's back as she made the perilous border crossing, he wants to be a U.S. Marine.

It is time those who talk tough about cracking down on illegal immigration start thinking about the people involved. These are for the most part hard-working people trying to make a better life, and this country should feel flattered that they want to come here – even despite the unwelcoming attitude that greets them.

A place such as Garden City is indeed an oasis to those escaping poverty in Mexico. And a job in construction or meat packing or milking cows is a good job.

The critics will say deport them so those jobs will be available for the many Americans unemployed. Again, easy to say.

But a telephone support call center, once a significant employer in Hays, just announced it is closing because it can't hire a full work force. That in a community with 3 percent unemployment. Problem is people won't move to Western Kansas.

Yes, forcing out the illegal immigrants probably would force employers to raise wages, and even if that did attract people to move to Western Kansas you can bet it would force up consumer costs, such as beef and dairy. In a country that subsidizes agriculture to keep prices down in the supermarket, how much sense does that immigration strategy make now?

It is time to dispense with the rhetoric. It isn't practical to deport all the illegal immigrants here now. We should improve the system to verify legal status in the workplace, but at the same time we have to create a way for more immigrants to come work here legally. Clearly enough work visas aren't available.

That is why we have a problem with illegal immigration. That, and this is the land of opportunity – or at least it always was.

– The Hutchinson News, via the Associated Press

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Islamophobia mirrors Christophobia

Islamophobia is real.

A minority of Americans have trouble differentiating between moderate Muslims and Islamic extremists. Over the years, news organizations have reported disturbing examples of the deep-seated hostility many Americans have towards Muslims.

"In Temecula, Calif., a group in July (2010) brought dogs to a protest where Muslims were praying, knowing full well that animals are regarded as unclean in Islam," an article in *Time Magazine* said.

Other countries in the so-called Western World have established draconian laws based on anti-Islam sentiments. France has a ban on wearing burqas, and Switzerland approved a referendum banning the construction of minarets, the prayer towers of mosques, with the approval of about 58 percent of the public. These intolerant policies should be denounced by people who cherish religious freedom.

Yet Islamophobia is far from the only example of religious intolerance plaguing the world. In fact, it pales in comparison to the Christophobia and antisemitism prevalent in nations with Muslim majorities. Liberals and progressives shouldn't avoid this subject because of some misperceived idea of political-correctness. Denouncing religious persecution in Muslim countries differs from making broad generalizations about all the Muslims inhabiting these countries.

From Nigeria to Saudi Arabia, the persecution of Christians has been on the rise in Muslim countries. The authoritarian government of North Sudan has brutally repressed Chris-



Andy Heintz

- Wildcat Ramblings

tian and animist minorities in South Sudan for years. The repression has continued despite North Sudan's sadistic dictator Omar al-Bashir being charged with three counts of genocide by the International Criminal Court in Hague, and the granting of semi-independence to South Sudan in July last year.

"In South Kordofan, Christians are still subjected to aerial bombardment, targeted killings, the disappearance of children and other atrocities," *Newsweek* reporter Ayaan Hirsi Ali writes. "Reports from the United Nations indicate that between 53,000 and 75,000 innocent civilians have been displaced from their residences and that houses have been looted and destroyed."

U.S. allies such as Pakistan and Saudi Arabia are among the worst perpetrators of religious persecution. Churches and private acts of prayer are banned in Saudi Arabia.

"... To enforce these totalitarian restrictions, the religious police regularly raid the homes of Christians and bring them up on charges of blasphemy in courts where their testimony carries less weight than a Muslim," writes Ali, who founded the AHA Foundation, which protects women in the West from oppression justi-

fied in the name of religion and culture.

A medieval blasphemy law first introduced by Islamic military dictator Gen. Zia ul-Haq in the 1980s continues to be used to persecute religious minorities in Pakistan. The law sentences to death or life imprisonment anyone that insults the Prophet Muhammad. In some cases, this backward law has been used to oppress innocent non-Muslims.

Antisemitism in Muslim countries is just as, if not more widespread than Christophobia. The scary thing is antisemitism isn't limited to fundamentalists like Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad; even supposedly moderate figures have been guilty of making unconscionable remarks about Jews.

The *Jakarta Globe* in Indonesia reported on a disgusting speech in January 2010 by Mahathir Mohamad, former prime minister of Malaysia.

"The Europeans killed six million Jews out of 12 million," Mohamad said, "but today the Jews rule this world by proxy. They get others to fight and die for them."

This fanatical rhetoric comes from a man who was prime minister of one of the more moderate Muslim countries for 22 years.

There are millions of Muslims who disapprove of this kind of rhetoric – a fact we should never forget – but the threat of radical Islam is real and deserves to be condemned by tolerant, loving people everywhere.

Andy Heintz, a K-State journalism graduate, loves K-State athletics and fishing, sports and opinion writing.

Liquor sales still under consideration

Here are some pieces of legislation debated in my committees last week.

Expanded Liquor Sales (HB2532)

Our Commerce and Economic Development committee held hearings on adding liquor and spirits for sale in grocery and convenience stores. This debate has been ongoing for several years. If passed, the bill would immediately allow the stores to sell full strength beer and wine if they have a class A or B license.

Bills Passed Out of the House This Week Public Employees Retirement System

HB2460 makes several technical amendments to the pension system in order to comply with federal requirements for public pension plans – an option for public employers to affiliate for future service only, the deletion of the requirement for a 7 percent contribution rate for first-year employers and the addition of a "good faith interpretation" reference with new federal regulations for required minimum distributions. Passed by the House 122 to 3.

HB2461 makes changes to the investment portfolio by allowing retirement system investors to participate in alternative investments to a greater degree. The bill allows 5 percent of the total market value of the fund to be with alternative investment options. The total investment fund value was \$12.9 billion with an alternative investment cap of \$128.6 million. This bill raises the limit to \$643 million this year alone. This passed 118 to 7.

Competitive Bid Protection Act

HB2515 establishes the Competitive Bid Protection Act to prevent requiring that potential bidders enter into any project labor agreement. Government entities are also prohibited



Rick Billinger

- This week in Topeka

from discriminating based on the presence or absence of labor agreements. The bill does not prevent bidders from entering into project labor agreements or supersede other provisions of state law or the National Labor Relations Act. Final action on this was to be Tuesday.

Health Care Reform Update (HCR5007)

The House passed HCR5007, the Health Care Freedom Amendment, during the 2011 session and sent it to the Senate. Last week the Senate Judiciary committee approved it and sent it to the full Senate. This proposes to amend the Kansas Constitution with Article 16 regarding health care. The resolution protests the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare) passed by Congress in March 2010, which imposed a federal mandate requiring all individuals to have a minimum level of health insurance.

The new article would prohibit any law or rule from compelling a person, employer or health care provider to participate in any health care system or purchase health insurance and allows a person or employer to directly pay for health care service and not be penalized.

Attorney General Derek Schmidt joined 25 other states in filing their initial briefs in the lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of the federal health care mandate.

Update on Capitol Construction

The latest figures on the capitol restoration include \$7 million for repairs to the grounds including landscape, driveways, ceremonial driveway, sidewalks, lighting, security, etc.

Some thoughts for saving money on the landscaping include combining the resources of Kansas service clubs, Master Gardeners, and Department of Administration oversight, which may save several million dollars.

The Master Gardeners would design an overall plan with the Capitol grounds crew. With over 100 species of Kansas flora, plants and creativity, we could have a state lawn like no other in the Union.

Lt. Gov. Colyer will be sending out letters in the near future with answers to questions that many families with developmentally disabled members have been asking.

Gov. Brownback is trying to get a meeting together with the Secretary of Labor, Sen. Ostmeyer, Rep. Cassidy, Rep. Hineman and myself to discuss home-owned carnivals.

You may go to the legislature's website at www.kslegislature.org and follow committee schedules, bills and other issues under consideration by the Kansas Legislature. I enjoy hearing from constituents on topics under consideration and appreciate your perspective. Please do not hesitate to contact me with thoughts, suggestions and concerns. Thank you for the honor of serving you.

Rick Billinger is the state representative from the 121st District. He currently serves on the Commerce and Economic Development, Education Funding, Insurance and Local Government committees.

Mallard Fillmore

- Bruce Tinsley

