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Forum: Immigration is an incredible conundrum

By Edward Marcus

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There is not a day that goes by when immigration is not in the media. Of late, the enormous migrant problem in Europe has been such a crisis mode that it has taken our attention away from the about 12 million undocumented immigrants now living in our country.

The words illegal immigrant have become a necessary password to participate in the Republican Party's debates, highlighted by Donald Trump's statement, "I want to build a wall, a wall that works." Trump has also called for mass deportations and opposes citizenship for children born in the U.S. to mothers who are here illegally.

America is a country created by immigrants. With the exception of Native Americans, all of us either are immigrants or come from families who were immigrants.

As America has grown we have experienced significant cycles of immigration starting in the 1800s when Chinese people were brought in for cheap labor. Then came Irish, Italians, Jews and Catholics. Now Muslims and Latinos.

Each wave of immigration has brought with it governmental action of some sort and in most cases outright discrimination against the new immigrant wave.

The 1924 Immigration Act created a quota system that favored people from Northern Europe — with Latinos exempt to provide cheap labor in the Southwest.

In 1954 we deported Latinos. Yet, the undocumented immigrant population has continued to grow and is now of a size that we must take action, making so-called illegal immigration a thing of the past.

How do we do this?

I believe that the following action by Congress would work. First, provide all undocumented immigrants with some type of identification cards (everyone entering the country should receive an ID). With the ID should come the ability to obtain a Social Security card in conjunction with obtaining legal employment.

Then, the path to citizenship would be open for those here for five years and more, not committing a crime, and facing no other legal impediment to becoming a citizen. Any committing a crime prior to citizenship, of course, would be subject to deportation.

This is not a panacea but a concept to end the current nightmare. At the very least we would know who is here, where they are, and it would provide the “illegals” with a path to citizenship. Separating parents from their children is not the answer nor is turning the issue into a political football. We can’t keep things as they are — it just doesn’t work.

How will the immigration conundrum play out in the presidential election? I do believe that in 2016 the Latino vote will react to the Republican anti-immigrant position by overwhelmingly supporting Democrat candidates.

On a local level in our neighboring town of East Haven, it will be interesting to see if the growing Hispanic vote will come out as a block in support of Mike Speer, who is running for mayor against Joe Maturo, who earned the nickname “Taco Joe” for his lack of sensitivity to abuse of Latinos. The Latino vote may well make the difference in that election. We will have to wait and see.

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