

Ed Koch is the former mayor of New York City. These comments are from the New York Post of June 17, 1994 and are reprinted by permission.

An Absurd Invitation

By Ed Koch

As the son of immigrant parents who came to New York from Poland more than four score years ago, I am proud of the fact that the city remains a magnet for immigrants. This is the city that elected me as mayor and the state that elected Mario Cuomo, also the son of immigrants, as governor.

As mayor, I exhorted immigrants to come to the city — legal immigrants. But what I did then is quite different from what Gov. Cuomo and Mayor Giuliani are doing now.

Last week, after announcing that New York state would not be joining Florida and California in filing suit against the feds to recover costs of services to illegal immigrants, Cuomo said, "I want to negotiate with the government instead for a lot of reasons. And one of them is, frankly, when you bring a lawsuit on this issue, it sends out the wrong message. I love immigrants. Legal, illegal — they're not to be despised."

Who says anyone should despise them? That's silly. But if they're illegal and not entitled to political sanctuary, you send them back to their countries of origin. Why shouldn't New York state sue the federal government for the \$1 billion or more it costs New York taxpayers to provide education and medical care for illegal immigrants? It's the feds who are failing in their responsibility to patrol the borders adequately.

You and I know the governor loves everybody in both hemispheres, but even he must realize there are limits — legal and moral — on how many immigrants can come here each year. Given their druthers, most of the world's population would like to come to the United States, and they don't need the governor's encouragement.

Giuliani went even further than the governor, saying, "Some of the hardest-working and most productive people in this city are undocumented aliens. If you come here and you work hard and you happen to be in an undocumented status, you're one of the people whom we want in this city. You're somebody that we want to protect, and we want you to get out from under what is often a life of being like a fugitive, which is really unfair."

No one denies that most immigrants, legal and illegal, are hard-working, and in recent years we have had an amnesty program that legalized the status of millions. But the mayor should not be advancing a policy that encourages immigrants to think of New York City as their safe haven. There are sections of the country that, bizarrely, have declared themselves

sanctuary zones — open to all — exempting themselves from the federal immigration laws. Of course, that is a ridiculous and illegal posture. To date, New York City and state have not been a part of that anarchist philosophy.

"It is the obligation of federal authorities ^{illegals} to apprehend and deport them ... it is the feds who should be responsible for the costs of educating the children and providing medical care while they ... [await] deportation."

You may recall that when I was mayor, I said that illegal aliens should send their children to school and get medical assistance if they needed it, without fear of being turned over to the Immigration and Naturalization Service. My actions were based on reality. As long as the undocumented children are here, we have no alternative but to educate them, teach them values, and seek to prevent them from turning to crime. If they or their parents are ill and can't afford a private doctor, we have to provide medical care, instead of allowing them to suffer needlessly and perhaps spread diseases to others. Otherwise, we run the risk of adding huge numbers of people to the city's underclass, rivaling those living in the *favelas* overlooking Rio de Janeiro.

It is the obligation of the federal authorities, who patrol our borders, to apprehend the illegals and deport them, not that of the New York City Police Department. It is the feds who should be responsible for the costs of educating the children and providing medical care while they are in the United States awaiting deportation.

What I did is a far cry from putting out the welcome mat, as the governor and mayor have done. Our generous immigration laws already allow more than 1 million people to legally enter this country every year, including some of those requesting political asylum. But the INS estimates

there are 3.85 million illegal immigrants in this country, 510,000 of whom live in New York state.

In her poem affixed to the Statue of Liberty, Emma Lazarus wrote: "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses..." but even Lazarus might have had second thoughts about issuing an open invitation to the world. If the line had cadence, perhaps she would have added, "A million a year is more than even I hope for."

By differing with Gov. Cuomo and Mayor Giuliani on this issue, am I breaking with them politically? Not at all. I don't require others to agree with me on everything. As a matter of fact, when I was mayor I used to say, "If you agree with me on 9 out of 12 issues, that's terrific. If you agree with me on 12 out of 12, see a psychiatrist."

I'm still rooting for the both of them. ■