

America's Immigration Dilemma

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My interest in immigration has grown, first out of my involvement with population and environment issues, and later as a public servant who had to set priorities and make sometimes painful decisions about how to allocate society's limited resources.

During my twelve years as governor of Colorado, I came to recognize that people — regardless of race, religion, ethnicity, or national origin — were our state's greatest resource. But I also came to realize that people were an asset that needed careful cultivation if their potential was to be realized. More people do not necessarily make for a better society. Better people do. And you get better people through better education, better health care, better environment, better housing, better public infrastructure, and a better sense of community. To support a larger population (if a larger population is ever our objective), a society must first improve the institutions that make for better, more productive citizens. To do otherwise is to put the cart before the horse.

My assessment of the bills before Congress [the Immigration Act of 1990] is that they are legislation for our times. They set no priorities and they make no hard choices. They simply say yes to everyone who has a demand to make on our immigration system.

However, by saying yes to virtually every interest group with a demand to make on the immigration process, Congress is, by default, cheating the public by saying no to better education for America's children, better wages and working conditions for American workers, better training and retraining programs for displaced or under-qualified American workers, better health care for America's disadvantaged, better and more affordable housing for young and poorer Americans, and better environment and more productive use of America's natural resources. Immigration policy is inexorably linked to virtually every aspect of public policy in the United States.