

Abraham Blocks

Analysis by David Payne

This op-ed by Mary Lou Tanton appeared in The Detroit News, Thursday, January 25, 1996, page 11A. Is it an argument of fact or persuasion as distinguished by David Payne on page 169?

BALD ASSERTION

What polls? Cited where? Published when?

UNCERTAIN PREDICTION

Adding the word "likely" here would reduce the impression of omniscience. The future remains unknown.

SOURCELESS QUOTATION

Source of this quote? With no reference to allow verification a quotation can be either misquoted or radically taken out of context.

FORCED CONCLUSIONS

Arguing that a person must hold a specific position because of other positions held is always speculative. There may be further reasons why Abraham doesn't feel led to these conclusions, or he may admit to being forced to agree with these points, but also hold that they are preferable to other, worse alternatives. Both of these are legitimate responses.

Recent polls show that more than four-fifths of all Americans believe our immigration policy should be overhauled. Congress finally is getting ready to enact meaningful immigration reform after years of ignoring a policy that, during the 1990s, will add to the U.S. population legal and illegal immigrants equal in number to twice the population of Michigan.

Unfortunately, a chief stumbling block to the reform effort may be Sen. Spencer Abraham, R-Mich.

The immigration reform legislation being proposed by Sen. Alan Simpson, R-Wyo., and Congressman Lamar Smith, R-Texas, would limit family-based immigration to the immediate nuclear family; make sponsors (not the U.S. taxpayer) financially liable for the immigrants they bring to this country; reduce legal immigration levels to 585,000 annually; and establish a verification procedure to make sure that illegal aliens don't work or collect benefits in this country. These reforms, in Abraham's view, violate "core principles of more freedom and less government."

Certainly, we all can agree that an immigrant should be permitted to bring a spouse and never-married minor children. But we also must recognize that immigrants make a conscious choice to separate from their extended families. Abraham apparently believes that when somebody voluntarily chooses to settle here, it becomes our responsibility to have a policy mechanism in place that allows immigrants to have their entire extended families follow them.

Aside from the fact that most Americans do not share this sense of obligation, the promise of endless extended family reunification is ultimately an unfulfillable one. By promising immigration entitlements to brothers and sisters, adult children and parents, we are creating an ever-expanding chain of migration.

Abraham also takes exception to the provision of the Simpson-Smith bills that allows 25,000 parents of immigrants to settle here, on the condition that the sponsoring children purchase nursing home and Medicare-comparable insurance for them. By his reckoning, asking children who bring their elderly parents to this country to assume responsibility for their needs qualifies as anti-family regulations.

Immigration Reform

Despite his passion for cutting social programs, Abraham ignores the fact that in the past decade the number of elderly immigrants who collect Supplemental Security Income has quadrupled.

Perhaps the greatest anathema to libertarians is the requirement that an electronic verification process be established to screen illegal aliens out of our labor force. Abraham frets that this is the encroachment of Big Brother and that the cost of setting up and using such a system constitutes another unfunded federal mandate.

Virtually everyone who has looked at the problem of illegal immigration agrees that jobs are the magnet that draws illegal aliens to this country. To control illegal immigration, we must have a way for law-abiding employers (and most are) to verify if a job applicant is legally entitled to work in the United States. This is not Big Brother encroaching on our privacy — all this information is already in countless public and private data bases — but a common sense measure to protect American jobs. As to the expense, there would no doubt be some start-up costs for such a system. But once in place, employment verifications would be carried out for mere pennies, in much the same way that credit cards are verified.

According to Abraham's Republican colleague, Sen. Paul Coverdell of Georgia, immigration is the most expensive of all federal unfunded mandates. State and local governments bear the brunt of the costs of providing education, health care, housing assistance and countless other essential services to immigrants, both illegal and legal.

The kind of future that most Americans want to bequeath to their children is a high-wage economy, a first rate education system, a compassionate safety net, a stable population size and a healthy environment. None of these goals can be realized if we continue the kind of free-for-all immigration policies of the past three decades.

On immigration, Sen. Spencer Abraham confuses less government with no government. Limiting immigration to immediate family members, requiring sponsors to assume financial responsibility for the people they bring to this country and controlling access to the U.S. labor market are examples of good government — which is precisely what people want.

MISLEADING QUANTIFICATION

Other phrases for "virtually everyone" and "most Americans" are "not everyone" and "not all Americans," but by phrasing in this manner the *appearance* of universality is given.

NON-SEQUITUR

The information enclosed within the dashes here is supposed to show that this is not Big Brother encroaching on our privacy. But this does not follow. Some people might argue that such information *just is* evidence that Big Brother is always encroaching on our privacy.

APPEAL TO INAPPROPRIATE AUTHORITY

Who is Paul Coverdell that we should rely on what he says? Does he have any specific credentials or qualifications that confer authority in this matter?

GUILT BY ASSOCIATION (WITH A TWIST)

Here's an effective technique! By associating the points you are arguing for with something that everyone wants, you can then conclude that everyone must want what you're arguing for. Thus, the unstated conclusion: limiting immigration, etc., is precisely what people want.