

DAILY BUSINESS REVIEW

BOARD OF CONTRIBUTORS A consensus immigration platform

Successful policy depends on amnesty, biometric ID card

Commentary by Lawrence P. Lataif

As the Nov. 2 election approaches, immigration remains an explosive and divisive topic for candidates and voters alike. A clear example: When Republican Reps. Mario and Lincoln Diaz-Balart and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen endorsed Republican Rick Scott for governor Oct. 4, they also stressed their disagreement with his tough immigration policy.

Consensus on immigration reform is elusive, but not impossible. If any consensus is to work, successful candidates who assume office in January will need to rally around an immigration policy that stands on three legs: amnesty, employer sanctions and a biometric ID.

Amnesty – or legalization – does not mean blanket amnesty for all illegal immigrants, which only invites chaos. Rather, it provides a path to citizenship with benchmarks. Legalization is only fair because our federal government bears some responsibility for the illegal immigrants already here. Lax enforcement has attracted illegal immigrants and allowed them to remain indefinitely and establish roots. Reducing their numbers through enforcement alone is lengthy, uncertain, and unlikely to rid the United States of criminals illegally here.

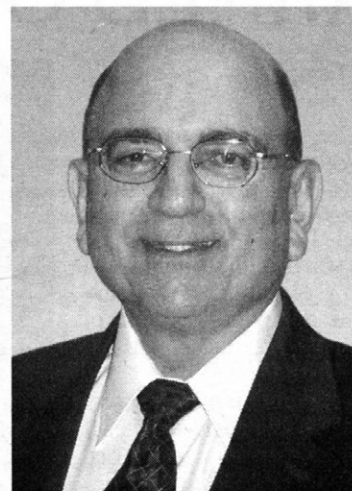
Any ordered path to citizenship would benefit from several provisions: First, all illegal immigrants should be required to self-identify with the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) within eight to 12 months. Those with criminal records (felonies and multiple offenses) and those who fail to self-identify would forfeit any chance for legalization and face immediate deportation. However, illegal immigrants with no criminal

records would receive temporary work status for five to seven years, after which they would qualify for legalization (the green card). After legalization, a relatively long path to citizenship of eight to 10 years would follow.

Employment verification and sanctions are vital to any reform. With more than 20,000 miles of borders, including shoreline, the United States can never expect border controls alone to keep all illegal immigrants out. Other mechanisms, already proven effective, can better identify illegal immigrants and deter them from working and living here freely.

E-Verify is the most important deterrent, particularly if mandatory and universal. This electronic, Internet-based system allows employers to verify employment eligibility within a few seconds. More than 216,000 employers participate and 1,400 join every week. Except for defense contractors, E-Verify remains voluntary. Current laws governing I-9 forms (documents required to prove workers' identity and eligibility for employment) are hyper-technical, onerous and ineffective. Employers deserve the simplicity of mandatory and universal E-Verify, balanced with stronger civil and criminal penalties for knowingly hiring illegal immigrants.

The biometric Social Security card deserves prominence in any debate on immigration reform. Employers now



Lawrence P. Lataif says there are three parts to a successful immigration policy: amnesty, employer sanctions and a biometric ID.



must be able to navigate through 26 different I-9 documents, almost none of them secure or biometric – that is, with fingerprints or other unique identifiers. Document fraud is therefore rampant.

In contrast, a uniform biometric card could be a major deterrent to illegal immigration if required for employment, bank accounts, school registration, government benefits and drivers' licenses. Since May 2010, every new green card issued is biometric. Several Native American tribes either have, or have requested,

biometric identification cards from the Department of Homeland Security. Why shouldn't the rest of us have such protection?

A biometric ID card would contain one's photograph, fingerprint and life-saving information such as blood type, emergency contact information, and organ donor preferences. Because a biometric card resists hacking, it protects privacy. Imagine the peace of mind from knowing that personal and financial information is useless to criminals unable to steal biometric identifiers.

Issuing 310 million new Social Security cards is expensive and time-consuming. But it is doable. Last month, India launched a sophisticated national ID system for its 1.2 billion people. Germany is among the latest countries to replace paper IDs with electronic cards. This global trend is only accelerating.

Immigration reform requires other measures, too. We need to secure our borders as much as possible by augment-



ing border controls, hiring more agents, sending National Guard troops when needed and strengthening border inspections of people and goods.

But there are other actions that we should take: Cut the red tape that makes it difficult for foreigners to invest \$500,000 to \$1 million in job-creating businesses through the EB-5 Investor Program; restore judicial review of immigration denials in business and naturalization cases; simplify visas for foreign scientists, medical researchers, and doctors; kill the lottery, which gives away 55,000 green cards a year for people without needed skills or family members in the United States; and, finally, terminate the visa waiver program, which was launched 20 years ago before the terrorist threat.

We do not need unrealistic proposals for mass deportations, blanket amnesty of all illegal immigrants, sealing the border, Arizona-style state immigration laws, repeal of the 14th Amendment (which confers U.S. citizenship on children born here) or a moratorium on all legal immigration.

Voters concerned about immigration should find common cause – and common sense – in these provisions, which control illegal immigration while welcoming the skilled foreign workers and professionals who strengthen our nation's economy. If candidates adopt such a platform, we could all wake up Nov. 3 with a much better chance of consensus for solving the country's immigration problems.

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