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WELCOME TO AMERICA

Fifteen authors offer this "Conservative Statement of Principles on Immigration"

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In his farewell address to the nation, President Reagan said: "I've spoken of the Shining City all my political life . . . [I]n my mind it was . . . teeming with people of all kinds living in harmony and peace, a city with free ports that hummed with commerce and creativity. And if there had to be city walls, the walls had doors and the doors were open to anyone with the will and heart to get here."

America is a nation of immigrants. Except for Native American Indians, everyone in this country came to America or is here due to the good fortune that a parent, grandparent, or other relation came before them. Keeping a door open to those with the "will and heart to get here" is vital to our economy, our culture, our role in the world, and our historic tradition as a land of freedom and opportunity.

Conservatives believe in legal immigration. We believe that America grows stronger by welcoming those who seek to better their families, work in our industries, and find liberty and refuge from oppression.

Conservatives oppose illegal immigration. We believe there is a right way and a wrong way to immigrate to the U.S. However, as conservatives we believe that our laws must reflect reality and common sense, be fiscally responsible, and avoid the loss of innocent life. Our current immigration laws do not pass this test.

Between 1990 and 2000, the U.S. increased the number of Border Patrol Agents from 3,600 to 10,000. During that same period illegal immigration rose by 5.5 million. Moreover, over the past eight years, more than 2,000 men, women, and children have died attempting to cross into America and seek the opportunity to work and achieve a better life. The status quo is unacceptable and clinging to the status quo -- or tougher versions of it -- is neither conservative nor principled. It has become clear that the only viable approach to reform is combining enforcement with additional legal avenues for those who wish to work in our economy, while also addressing the situation of those already here in the U.S.

President Bush has proposed a new legal path to work in the U.S. through a temporary worker program that will match willing workers with willing employers. We applaud the president and believe his approach holds great promise to reduce illegal immigration and establish a humane, orderly, and economically sensible approach to migration that will aid homeland security and free up border-security assets to focus on genuine threats. The president has shown courage by calling on Congress to place reality over rhetoric and recognize that those already working here outside the law are unlikely to leave. Congress can fulfill its role by establishing sufficient increases in legal immigration and paths to permanent residence to enable more workers to stay, assimilate, and become part of America.

We believe strongly in assimilation and oppose efforts to weaken the historical process that has led to *e pluribus unum*. While immigrants by and large reject entreaties by those who favor multiculturalism, the best defense is a good offense: making the teaching of English and civics a priority in our schools, community colleges, and adult education programs.

Immigrants are crucial to our competitiveness and future labor and economic growth, as well as our military strength. Our country's welcoming attitude to immigrants will permit the U.S. to grow and prosper, as the populations of many other nations stagnate and decline. Each generation of Americans must connect our nation's past to its future and in so doing keep President Reagan's vision of the "Shining City" alive.

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