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## **Socialism and Immigration**

**by Scott McPherson**

In the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, it has become increasingly fashionable and popular to loudly proclaim the dangers, threats, costs, and consequences of immigration. If the constant ranting from editorial pages is any gauge, one would think that virtually every ill our society faces can be laid squarely at the feet of the immigrant population.

An example of this continuing diatribe against foreigners was a nationally syndicated column by columnist Phyllis Schlafly, “Adding to the High Costs of Health Care,” which appeared in the *Washington Times* on January 24. “While Americans without health insurance struggle with the problem of how to pay for medical care, Mexicans don’t have that problem,” says Schlafly. “They just ride in a Mexican ambulance across the border ... and get free medical treatment.”

The problem of paying medical treatment costs for illegal immigrants is becoming well publicized. Senators John McCain and John Kyl, Arizona Republicans, have introduced legislation that would help their state’s hospitals cope with the financial burden by using federal tax dollars to defray the massive costs.

And what a burden it is. A study conducted by the U.S.-Mexico Border Counties Coalition shows that U.S. hospitals in the border states of Arizona, New Mexico, California, and Texas are spending at least \$200 million a year for emergency care to illegal aliens, according to Schlafly. “In the four border states, 77 hospitals now face a medical emergency,” she wrote. The Cochise County, Arizona, Health Department is spending 30 percent of its annual budget to pay for immigrant care; the Copper Queen Hospital in Bisbee, Arizona, spends \$200,000 — two-thirds of its net operating income — for such costs; the University Medical Center in Tucson spent \$10 million; and the list goes on. Many medical facilities are on the verge of bankruptcy. The end result is obvious: without some kind of reprieve, many border-area medical-care facilities — even some of the largest — may have to shut their doors.

What’s causing this? “A combination,” charges Schlafly, “of U.S. officials allowing the Mexican cars to cross our border plus the federal Emergency Medical Treatment and Active Labor

Act, which mandates that U.S. hospitals with emergency-room services treat anyone who shows up for care including illegal aliens” pushes the price of immigrants’ health care onto the shoulders of American hospitals, medical-care consumers, and taxpayers.

Notice the deceptive package deal: a permissive border policy, we are to believe, must share the blame with coercive legislation forcing emergency health-care providers to treat everyone who comes through their doors. This strategy certainly meshes well with the general anti-immigrant tone in the country today, but it misses some vital reflection.

In fairness to Schlafly, she did inform her readers about the emergency-care legislation, and even has a few choice words for Arizona’s senators. (Their “solution,” she quips, will “lighten the tax burden on [Arizona] while shifting it to U.S. taxpayers nationwide. How parochial,” she adds.) But make no mistake. For her, and the many people whose feelings she represents, the real problem is — as ever — immigrants:

“Other costs of dumping of Mexicans on U.S. hospitals include transporting the seriously ill by helicopter from small border hospitals to Tucson or Phoenix [ranging] from \$7,000 to \$20,000 a trip.... In San Antonio, University Health System officials have proposed a statewide quarter-cent sales tax to help hospitals pay for uninsured persons who show up at the door. During the last three years, Houston’s Harris County Hospital District spent \$330 million to treat and immunize illegal aliens.... In California, where the state budget crunch is forcing reductions in Medicaid and the Children’s Health Insurance Program ... the law requires hospitals to continue to serve illegal aliens free.... These costs are especially onerous because hospitals are struggling with falling Medicare and Medicaid reimbursement rates ... and most states are struggling with revenue shortfalls....”

And it’s not just the border states that are laboring under this weight, Schlafly reports. “Florida hospitals last year spent \$40.5 million providing care to uninsured aliens,” not to mention the “many illegal aliens who are injured in highway accidents when the trucks they are jammed into like sardines are driven recklessly by uninsured Mexican drivers trying to evade police.”

Another “cost” of immigrants in our midst, says Schlafly, is “food-stamp fraud.” Because aliens come “from countries that have no respect for a rule of law, they don’t understand that selling food stamps is a crime.... Food-stamp fraud among illegal aliens came to light in 1996 when Ohio authorities discovered a Jordanian man and his uncle had deposited \$24 million in purchased food stamps in ... bank accounts. A ring of Somali asylum seekers,” she continues, “netted \$40,000 in food-stamp fraud.”

In the world according to Phyllis Schlafly, apparently only immigrants (particularly nonwhite immigrants) engage in fraud, have no respect for the rule of law, receive welfare, demand medical care despite being unable to pay for it, and generally make themselves a burden on the productive members of society.

“When are Americans going to wake up,” comes the predictable finale, “to the price we are paying because our government won’t stop the invasion of illegal aliens?”

More than 150 years ago, French economist and libertarian Frédéric Bastiat described the contorting of language — the sophisms — in his day designed to inspire instant dread and paralyze any logical or analytical thinking in the average citizen. Such was the motive when words such as “invasion,” “flood,” and “tribute” were regularly used by the opponents of free trade to rally support against the importation of foreign goods. “Sometimes a sophism expands until it permeates the whole fabric of a long and elaborate theory,” he wrote in his essay “Metaphors.” “More often it contracts and shrinks, assumes the form of a principle, and takes cover behind a word or a phrase.”

This exact same strategy is being widely used today as a means of rallying Americans against immigrants. Take Schlafly’s (ab)use of the word “invasion” for her own nativistic purposes. Just as in the free-trade debates Bastiat described in 19<sup>th</sup>-century France, the intent is to conjure subconscious images of foreign barbarians thirsting for plunder at the expense of those who live here.

But an invasion means the use of armies to conquer foreign lands and rule over their inhabitants. Immigrants, legal or otherwise, aren’t out to destroy, rape, or rule. For the most part, they’re poor individuals who want to work and make a better life for themselves and their families (albeit jammed like sardines into their uninsured, recklessly driven trucks on the run from the police). This was once taken for granted, but is now jet fuel for demagogic columnists.

“Cost” is another red herring in the immigration debate. In the context used, the “cost” of immigrants suggests that our paying is part and parcel of an open-immigration policy. Nothing could be further from the truth. Americans are responsible for immigrants only because the dominant paradigm holds as sacred the use of government force to compel one person to provide for the welfare of another. Writers like Phyllis Schlafly rouse themselves to moral indignation over the “price” we’re paying for immigrants, when it’s only the welfare state — dutifully maintained by the Democratic and Republican parties — which makes that possible.

In a faddish fallacy which groups together “invasion,” “cost,” and “immigrants” as overlapping concepts, we have indeed found our own sophism which has assumed “the form of a principle” but “takes cover behind a word or a phrase.”

For the first 150 years of our Republic, Americans rejected the income tax, Social Security, Medicare, welfare, food stamps, public housing, and all of the socialistic policies that prevail in our society today. After 70 years of the welfare state, however, it is now taken for granted that the poor and underprivileged have some legal claim on the wealth of those more fortunate than they. To argue that someone doesn’t deserve a crack at the booty because he was born a few miles to the south is to establish arbitrary limits on a principle that knows no bounds. For if you accept the premise that the government can rightly take from one person in order to give the money to

another, you're hardly on solid moral ground to start expounding on the moral depravity of redistribution when the recipient group happens to be one you don't like.

The fact is, the welfare state, in all its manifestations, is morally wrong, and the cost of illegal immigration, just like the cost incurred by any parasitic behavior, is one of its many consequences. Of course it is frustrating for Americans to see their health-care costs and taxes rising when people can come from another country and receive care at their expense, but there is absolutely no difference between that and our sacred Medicare and Medicaid programs, which Americans – including Phyllis Schlafly – seem to hold inviolable.

Immigration has always brought positive developments to our country. For more than 200 years immigrants have come to our shores bringing new ideas, strong moral codes and work ethics, belief in the value of family, and patriotic zeal for our republican principles. When they arrive to find the welfare state has replaced our once-noble reverence for limited government, property rights, individual freedom, and voluntary charity, what is revealed is not the cost of immigration, but the true cost of socialism.

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