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Minuteman Project Is a Fraud

by Sheldon Richman

If people who make up the Minuteman Project really want to do something for their country, they should devote their energies to getting rid of the stifling welfare state. Aside from all the good that would do for citizens, it would also ensure that anyone coming here from a foreign country would be looking for something other than a handout coerced from the taxpayers.

But that's not what the Minuteman Project is about. Instead, this "citizens' neighborhood watch along our border" looks for foreigners who, by and large, are seeking better, more-productive lives for themselves and their children. The self-appointed American border guards inform the authorities when they find any. This strikes me as most out of keeping with the heritage of a country born in revolution, devoted to individual freedom, and skeptical of political power. The irony is that these Americans claim to be acting in the tradition of the original Minutemen, those brave early Americans who were always ready to engage the British forces during the struggle for independence. But this claim is bogus.

Back during the colonial period, the American people's attitude toward political power was displayed every time they ran a customs official out of town on a rail — appropriately tarred and feathered. In contrast, smugglers were cheered as heroes. People understood their natural rights in those days. Those who brought them products were seen as good; those who interfered with trade were seen as bad.

Something changed somewhere along the line. Now when people from other countries want to supply something to them, many Americans are afraid. It is not only imported goods that worry them; imported services, even manual labor, strike fear in their hearts. Most people who come to this country are looking for jobs because opportunity back home is scarce. That is, they come not to take something, but to offer us their services. Sure, they want to consume. But most of them understand that they need to produce in order to consume. As someone once said, immigrants have one mouth, but two hands.

The participants in the Minuteman Project say they are not against immigration or immigrants, but only illegal immigrants. Some skepticism is in order. If they were convinced that

illegals were beneficial to our society, would they be down at the border with their binoculars and mobile telephones? I doubt it. The project is fueled by a concern that illegals are bad for America. But are they bad for America? Economically, the answer is no. The fear that immigrants take jobs from Americans is based on the fallacy that there is a fixed amount of work to do. This in turn is based on the fallacy that human wants are limited. When you understand that our desire for goods and services is unlimited, the fallacies are exposed. Labor will always be scarce relative to our wish for products. Whenever a surplus of labor appears, the culprit is the government, which has myriad ways of artificially raising the price of hiring workers, thereby creating involuntary unemployment. Free markets are the solution.

But what about immigrants who seek taxpayer handouts? Undoubtedly, some do so. So let's stop the handouts — to everyone, native and immigrant alike. They constitute immoral compulsory transfers from producers to nonproducers and have no place in a society based on freedom and consent. Repealing welfare-state programs for all will make it clear that Americans are not against foreigners, just against freeloaders of whatever origin.

If immigration overloads government services — hospitals, schools, et cetera — it's just another reason to privatize them. Do Wal-Mart, Kroger, and Blockbuster Video complain about a flood of new customers?

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