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Conservatives and Immigration Control

by Bart Frazier

To most people, the idea of open borders seems like a radical idea. And of the people most vehemently opposed to it these days, conservatives top the list. But if a run-of-the-mill conservative were to take the philosophical underpinnings of his politics into account, he would find that he too should be calling for open borders. For what is our system of border management but the socialistic central plan that all conservatives know is doomed to failure?

Conservatives usually have little difficulty grasping the pragmatic and moral superiority of a free market. Under the guidance of the invisible hand, goods and services are distributed to those who value them most. Any inefficient participant in the process is quickly cast aside for lack of profit; to succeed, he must find a niche in the economy where his services are more highly valued by consumers. This free-market process continually makes a society more prosperous.

Among the pantheon of conservative intellectuals, not many stand above the Nobel laureate economist Friedrich A. Hayek. A little more than 50 years ago, his essay “[On the Use of Knowledge in Society](#)” explained in the most eloquent way why central planning is impossible. The capabilities just don’t exist for government officials to gather every bit of information necessary to make the calculations for the efficient distribution of *anything*. There are too many market participants and too many changing local market situations for any person or committee to plan the market for the simplest of goods.

On the other hand, a free market gathers all of this information automatically and displays it for everyone to see through the price system. The price system is the message-delivering process of the free market. It tells producers when to produce and consumers when to conserve.

In addition to being efficient, a free market is the only moral way for society to exist. Why should any person or government have the right to tell anyone else what to do with his property, assuming that person doesn’t violate another’s rights in the process? There is simply no other way to live.

The principles of the free market apply to economic goods across the board. Baseball tickets, accounting services, milk, automobiles, grass seed, electricity, parks, et cetera, are all

better supplied by the market rather than by a government agency. As long as property rights are defined for any given object, the free market will produce it and distribute it best. There is no reason this should not apply to the labor market as well.

So why do conservatives have such a blind spot when it comes to immigration? After all, the property rights are clearly defined, for conservatives surely know that the starting point for all property rights is that an individual owns himself. And all people make up the market for labor. Here we have a market and clearly defined property rights. The free market would clearly provide the best solution to any shortage or oversupply of labor that confronts the market. Yet when it comes to people, conservatives want government to do the planning and controlling.

All conservatives know how disastrous it can be to mess with the pricing mechanism through price controls. We all remember those gas lines, right? So how is it the conservative can be so adamantly against price controls, yet be vehemently in favor of controlling the labor market?

The worst part of immigration control is not the economic inefficiency and perverse results, but the severely adverse effects it has on people. People die because of immigration controls. At least when price controls are put on gasoline, some of the worst effects are that long lines form. But in the case of immigration controls, people seeking a higher standard of living sometimes die crossing deserts and oceans trying to achieve it.

Conservatives should see immigration control for what it is: a power-centralizing, nanny-state program of an increasingly powerful federal government. Market interventions like this simply won't work and this particular one kills people. We should abandon immigration central planning completely.

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This article was originally published in July 2006.