

Vicente J. Ximenes

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Mr. Henry Santiestevan
Editor
National Council of La Raza
1025 15th St., N.W.
Washington, D. C. 20005

Dear Henry:

I read the Agenda issue on the nationwide impact of the border. Unfortunately none of the articles came close to pinpointing the problem or suggesting a solution.

The overview section fails to even mention the northern border with Canada and the ocean border with almost every nation in the world. The editors failed to inform the reader that the Mexican border is one part of a larger relationship with the nations of the world. Congressman Gonzales is the only one that recognized this relationship in his defense of a negative vote on the immigration and nationality act. It is a serious mistake that should not be allowed to occur since you are writing and publishing opinions on the lives, hopes, and aspirations of the Mexican American of this nation. The time is upon us when we cannot allow half-baked do-gooder type opinions to fog, fuzzy up and divert us from a solution.

My friend Julian Samora's article entitled "Immigration History Provides Key" has no hole to insert the key and ends with recommendations that maintain the status quo. How can a Raza write the history of immigration from the point of view of a U.S. Chicano and not mention the names of the people who made the history? It's like writing the history of the U.S. Constitution without mentioning Washington, Jefferson, Hamilton, or Tom Paine. How can an article that begins by stating that "Chicanos were here before the United States was born" mention only one Chicano name in an article and magazine that purports to write about Raza history and immigration? How can it be possible to mention Eckler and Zlotnick and not Gonzales and Garcia who made the history of which he speaks? How can Samora fail to mention our forefathers in an article that relates to them. Samora writes of Chicanos as if we are an amorphous group of people without voice, form, name, or soul. But more than that the writer does not research or mention the real causes of the immigration problem. Is it discrimination, racism, powerlessness, Congress, Mexico, the corporations, unions, or maybe a Communist plot. I doubt very seriously that it is because the Mexican illegal is poorer than the Mexican American citizen. It certainly is not solely because the farmer needs cheap labor since even the U.S. Treasurer Ramona Banuelos used them in her tortilla factory. In fact many of the illegal Mexicans gravitate to the barrio and the Chicano community for protection.

Dave North, my former executive director of the Inter-Agency Committee on Mexican American Affairs in his article on "U. S. Government moving to cut back Immigration from Mexico" provides a fairly lucid account and blow by blow description of how legislation moved in the House and stalled in the Senate. I am surprised that Dave did not point out that the decisions on what happens on the Mexican border are not made by the people from those areas or their representatives or the local governing bodies. The situation is similar to the one in which Kissinger had to go to Russia and China to resolve the Viet Nam war. As for the lack of Mexican American organization testimony on the issue it seems that the leadership of these organizations thought it more important to negotiate with White House aide William Marumoto for their own grants and projects than to look out for the welfare and advancement of the Chicanos of this nation. I can understand the Republican White House willing to buy, but I can't understand the Chicanos willing to sell.

When one speaks of one million illegal aliens from another nation, the subject is one that might best be handled by the United Nations or perhaps even the Organization of American States. We have for too long deluded ourselves into thinking that the U. S. can unilaterally resolve the issues and problems by the power to regulate entry of aliens to the U.S. and set conditions for citizenship. For the Chicano it has been an exercise in futility because most of the leadership has been confused on the issue and the result has been conflict among the Chicanos.

The Chicanos in California fought over a state law, now declared unconstitutional, which would require proof of citizenship prior to employment. The work, effort and conflict generated by the state law and similar immigration issues has been absolutely futile since the States cannot and should not attempt to regulate an international flow of persons in or out of the United States. I realize that the national and international leadership pushes the issue into the State arena with the confident knowledge that nothing will or can be resolved. I believe that if the Senate accepts penalties for employers of illegals (not likely) the bill will be either vetoed or the courts will declare the law unconstitutional the first time a Chicano or other person complains that his employment rights have been jeopardized. The issue will rest exactly where it was prior to the effort to invoke a law.

concentrate

We should concentrate our efforts on two fronts. The first is on legal immigration and the power of Congress to regulate it and set conditions for citizenship. We should realize that in terms of numbers this front is the least important for we are discussing 20,000 vs 70,000 as against 1 million illegals and an undetermined number of daily shoppers who really work and/or live in the United States. Therefore the issue of legal immigration from Mexico is a matter of principle in that Mexicans should not be discriminated against by an act of Congress.

The second front is to influence the Presidency, or what's left of it at present, and of course the State Department and their agreements with foreign countries. The second front is really the key to the issue of immigration for while Congress may legislate on domestic matters, the Executive thru the State Department makes the agreements that bring about the inter-change of trade, immigration, military and space concessions to U. S. by foreign countries, exports and imports, etc.

No problem or issue on immigration can be resolved on the basis of the U. S. and Mexican border situation. We have mistakenly assumed that the problem is in Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, or California. The fact is that we have agreements with Canada and other nations and any action or law that affects the Mexican border may disturb international agreements. Hearings on the commuter issue brought forth an exchange as follows:

Mr. Scammon: Several years ago there was a Treaty established between the United States and Canada with respect to automobile manufacturing and automobile parts manufacturing. Has this had any effect on the commuter picture, one way or the other?

Mr. Sahli: Well, we feel that it probably has. It is one of the causes for the reduction of commuters. That is, the parity of salaries and the other provisions, all reaching a point where salaries and working conditions are pretty much the same in the United States and Canada, which actually means that there are more people who are willing to work in Canada rather than move into the United States.

Mr. Scammon: In other words, Mr. Sahli, as long as there is no decrease in employment in the United States and the wage conditions are about the same, the commuter question does not become relevant?

Mr. Sahli: That is right.

President Lyndon Johnson recognized the problem and knew what the solution was with respect to the immigration and contracting and commuting of workers. Johnson also knew that the Chicano was placed in competition with the poverty of another country. I am convinced that President Johnson knew he would have to end run the State Department in order to resolve the immigration question. For that reason he created the Border Commission for Friendship and Development and named Ambassador Telles to head it. President Johnson, I believe wanted to deal directly with President Diaz Ordaz rather than thru the layers of State Department protocol. For reasons that I do not understand, Raymond Telles never got the Commission off the ground and when Nixon was elected in 1968 he promptly wiped out the Border Commission.

My ideas on immigration are further explained in a statement I made at the LBJ library on the occasion of the Civil Rights Symposium. President Johnson was present at the meeting and heard my remarks on the issue of immigration. He must have agreed with my analysis because he wrote what was probably one of the last personal notes before his death. (see attached)

In my analysis I pushed aside all the garbage on the legality or illegality as well as the administrative practices of the Immigration and Naturalization Service. I contend that until we understand that the in or out flow of immigrants is a function of economics and international agreements the issue cannot be resolved or intelligently discussed. At the moment the inward flow of Mexican immigration is a form of foreign aid to Mexico, but the cost of that aid is heavily borne by the Chicano citizen.

I can understand Mexico's willingness to export some of its unemployment in exchange for commercial trade. I cannot understand why the costs of that arrangement are saddled on a group of people that cannot afford them. The U. S. Chicano has been burdened for years with these foreign aid costs. They are paid by the Chicanos in the form of loss of jobs, discrimination, second-class citizenship, and low paying migrant work. Let's divide these costs among the entire population. There is a way to do it. We have gone as far as making agreements with Turkey to pay farmers to quit growing poppies. Why can't we make arrangements with Mexico to stop human exploitation on both sides of the border?

Non-citizens from Mexico are the subject of heavy-handed discrimination which is easily applied to Chicano citizens as well, for there are no differences in name, features, language, and general characteristics. I do not imply that it is right to discriminate against non-citizens, but rather that some agreements must be reached to protect the rights of both Chicano and non-citizen. I am opposed to the State or national laws that may result in search or seizure of aliens as well as U.S. citizens.

The Naturalization and Immigration Service shuttles illegal Mexican aliens across the border by the hundreds. And those of us who are Chicano citizens must think, there but for the grace of God go I.

Sincerely,

Vicente



MS

AUSTIN, TEXAS

Dear Vicente:

I have never been prouder of anyone from Floresville in all my life -- your remarks at our Civil Rights Symposium were both meaningful and eloquent, and so justly deserved the applause they received.

Your contribution of time, ability, and esteem is deeply appreciated by me, and I know everyone that attended the Symposium feels the same.

With fondest regards and all good wishes to you and yours for a Happy Holiday Season,

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'C. J. ...' with a flourish at the end.

Honorable Vicente T. Ximenes
304 Monroe Street, N. E.
Albuquerque, New Mexico 87108

December 14, 1972