

BLUEPRINT FOR IMMIGRATION AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Iowa's economy is booming. Iowa's population is shrinking. Iowa has one of the best education systems in the country. As its young people graduate, they move to other states for exciting new jobs in information technology, telecommunications, and other emerging industries.

With the increasing decline of Iowa's rural population and aging workforce, the State can no longer afford to ignore plummeting rural school enrollment, disappearing rural population, and the inability of Iowa businesses to attract and retain a viable workforce. It must come to terms with the only realistic solution to these problems: immigration.

1. Iowa must form a permanent Commission on Immigration/Workforce Development.

The commission should be made up of business and community leaders and immigration experts from around the State. Its mission: to develop a comprehensive immigration policy to address Iowa's long-term workforce needs. It would recommend policy initiatives, and oversee Iowa's Immigration Office.

2. Iowa must establish an Immigration Office.

This office must inventory and compile a schematic both of immigrants in Iowa and of those organizations already serving immigrants. The immigration office would survey the unmet needs of each immigrant group. Grants and legislative proposals would be developed to address these needs.

3. Iowa must utilize the resources already available rather than developing an immigration bureaucracy.

Immigrants in general do not trust government agencies. Many of the immigrants come from extremely corrupt war-torn countries, where the government is the problem. The State also has a serious conflict of interest, due to its law enforcement responsibilities.

Iowa should utilize those organizations already serving immigrants, by identifying their capabilities. The State should provide grants to address specific needs, thereby conserving precious tax dollars. The Immigration/Workforce Commission would administer such grant program.

5. The primary mission of Iowa's Immigration Office: coordinate the flow of information and referrals

among Iowa employers, community and government agencies, non-profit organizations, and immigrants.

Iowa employers, community and government agencies, and law enforcement officials need a central office for knowledgeable information regarding immigration, immigration law, and resources. Immigrants likewise need a central information office.

Bi-lingual persons would staff this office around the clock. They would collect data and serve as an information clearing house, with a toll-free telephone.

6. Iowa's leaders must become proactive in understanding and developing immigration policy/legislation.

Immigration law and immigration itself is extremely complex. Iowa's leaders must understand these areas, and their effect on Iowa. They must develop and advocate immigration initiatives.

8. Iowa's leaders must actively advocate for increased immigration and acceptance of immigrants by Iowa's population, and halt law enforcement efforts aimed at immigrants

Iowa's leaders must actively advocate tolerance and diversity. They must come out strongly against English-only laws and other measures aimed against immigrants, including immigration enforcement by state and local officials.

9. Iowa must repeal the 1996 law on forgery of immigration documents.

Iowa Code § 715A.2(2)(a)(4) criminalizes possession of a forged document authorizing entrance, residence, or employment "in the United States." Iowa passed this law in 1996, in a wave of anti-immigrant hysteria, to empower Iowa police to deport alien immigrants. Enforcement of federal immigration law is normally strictly reserved to the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS).

Deportation often results in the permanent separation of young children from their fathers and young wives from their husbands. Iowa must repeal this law, and stop all law enforcement efforts aimed at immigrants.

10. Iowa must demand that the INS remove its Quick Response Team.

The INS has placed a "Quick Response Team" (QRT) in Iowa. Its focus: deportation of unlawful immigrants,

especially Hispanics. The QRT is akin to ethnic cleansing police, creating fear and insecurity among Iowa's immigrants. Iowa's leaders must demand its removal from Iowa.

Conclusion

Iowa has long been a land of immigrants. We welcomed thousands of Southeast Asians under Governor Bob Ray following the Vietnam war. However, other than this single influx of a rather small number of immigrants, Iowa has not experienced a significant wave of immigration since the late 1800's.

Iowa has become used to its English-only white majority status. It must break out of this mold if it is to grow and replenish its population and workforce. To do so, Iowa must take a proactive stance.

Iowa's leaders must reconsider their own role in directing Iowa immigration policy. Without strong leadership, Iowa will continue its present incoherent and essentially directionless immigration policy.

Iowa's business leaders must step into the ring. Concerns about Iowa's low wages and immigrants must be addressed in a proactive manner. Business leaders must be willing to come up with some answers, and money and wages to back this up.

Iowa's relationship with the INS must be seriously examined. Iowa police must cease enforcement of federal immigration laws.

Finally, Iowa's residents must carefully examine their own attitude towards immigrants. The caustic effect of English-only legislation cannot be over-estimated. Creating a climate of distrust and exclusivity makes Iowa less attractive to the very people we need most.

Iowa can successfully surmount these problems. It will take serious work and coordination. However, without such effort, Iowa as we know it will disappear. We must not let this happen.