

June 29th, 2012

My mother was a single mom. She left Michigan and moved to Arizona with my brother and me when we were both pre-teenagers. We've been here for nearly 45 years. It's home, and I have known no other through my formative years.

Last week, when President Obama relaxed our Nation's policies relative to children of illegal immigrants, I reflected on how it would have impacted me had my mother been an illegal and had arrived in Tucson with her underage kids. As I said, this is home, and always has been. I've gone through college here, gotten married here, raised my daughter here. This is home. What if she had brought us here without the proper 'papers?' Would those opportunities have even been available to me or would I have been relegated to hiding as a member of an underclass living in the most prosperous nation in the world? Had that been the case, would that have yielded the best result for society?

Under the new policy, the government will exercise its discretion and not pursue children of illegal immigrants who are under 30 years of age, who were brought to this country before turning 16, who have no felony record, have lived here continuously for at least five years, and who are either currently in school, have graduated from high school or obtained an equivalency diploma, or who have been honorably discharged from the military. If a person meets those criteria, he or she may obtain a two-year deferment from any prosecution for being in this Country illegally, and he or she may work legally here in the interim.

Let's be honest about this. Our political class has made this a wedge issue between conservatives and liberals who reside at the ends of the political spectrum. They have not shown themselves willing or capable of finding a middle ground that is fair to the children involved, is fair to those who are currently in line seeking full citizenship through legal channels, and respects the fact that we have an unemployment problem that cannot be dismissed. The middle ground has been lost in the rhetoric. The President has given a two year window during which we should all insist that our elected officials come together and craft a middle ground solution to this multi-faceted issue. There are legitimate arguments to be made from all sides. And yet, there are human lives in the balance as well.

I do not like the manner in which the President imposed this measure. Law by Executive Order strikes me as disenfranchising the electorate. I am also not so naïve to think that the timing of the move was not politically motivated. There's an election in a few months and the President must have felt he needed some juice with a portion of his base. And yet, the fact remains there are millions of people here today who are forced into the status of an underclass due to the actions taken by their parents at a time in which they were not able to resist. There's a raw political reality, and there's a human reality that must trump the politics if we are truly a compassionate people. We have two years to work out a solution.

I am not an open borders advocate. We have legitimate reasons to develop secure borders. And we have the same legitimate right to establish the conditions surrounding

our sovereignty that every other nation in the world does. But someplace embedded in those rights as a nation also exist the responsibilities we have to our fellow man to provide for the 'least of those among us.' There's the letter of the law, and there's the spirit of the people that underlies that letter. We now have two years to dig deep and find that spiritual underpinning of who we are as a people, beyond the labels and rhetoric. That's going to take We the People who reside in the middle of the political bell curve to come together and lead the way towards a solution.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Steve Kozachik". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a distinct loop at the end.

Steve Kozachik
Tucson City Council Member, Ward 6