

STOP PROMOTING HATE IN POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS

Norman Olshansky

While it's early in the election season, we've already been subjected to months of campaign rhetoric promoting hate and fear of those who may not look like us, come from distant shores, practice different religions, or have varied gender identities.

As Jews it was bone chilling to hear a political candidate using Hitlerian terms about opponents as vermin, animals, criminals and saying immigrants are "poisoning the blood." That candidate is not alone espousing derogatory attacks on immigrants.

When politicians oppose sound public policy that address real economic hardship among everyday citizens, it's easy to scapegoat those who are different, and drum up fear and hate of vulnerable immigrants. Can you imagine if Hitler had the internet and social media to spread his venom? How much worse would his impact have been? Today's politicians have those tools and more. We've heard border hysteria amplified daily on major news networks, on social media, elevated by influencers and trolls.

A bi-partisan immigration bill, with widespread support, was defeated so that certain politicians could keep playing the immigration fear card. As if in lockstep, the anti-immigrant marching orders made their way into a Sarasota School Board workshop. During the public comments that followed, community members reminded the board of a long-standing Supreme Court decision, Plyler vs. Doe, which stated that all children are entitled to the same public education as any other child. In addition, a special County Commission hearing further inflamed anti-immigrant sentiment. The public reminded the Commissioners that Sarasota and Florida's economy is dependent on migrant labor for many vital jobs in construction, healthcare, trucking, agriculture and landscaping. Millions of dollars of migrant wages are paid in taxes, Social Security, and Medicare. Yet, those same workers never get to receive any of the benefits. Immigrants are getting paid less than Americans would be willing to work for and at much more backbreaking jobs. Once again certain partisan politicians gaslight the public about who is

costing whom. We have also been subjected to fear mongering and lies about crime. National crime statistics report that violent crime has fallen significantly in recent years.

Immigrant crime rates are far lower than the general population and immigrants keep Florida and Sarasota's economy afloat. Their children will become the future leaders of our nation as they work hard academically, just like immigrant children before them. The genius of America has always been because we are a nation of immigrants.

We are not talking about illegal immigrants. The vast majority of immigrants came to the U.S. legally with visas or are applying for refugee status. Yes, we need secure borders and adequate funding to support immigration courts and the Border Patrol. Let's not demonize and claim all immigrants and immigration are a problem.

Most faith traditions welcome the stranger. In Judaism it's our most repeated commandment of the Torah, addressed 36 times. That teaching is also found in the sacred texts of Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism and other religions. Christianity teaches us to give hospitality to strangers. Hinduism emphasizes universal hospitality. Buddhism teaches loving kindness toward friends and strangers. The Quran calls for "the care of the wayfarer." In Bahai there are no strangers; there is a "brotherhood of humanity."

Suncoast Jewish Alliance calls for clergy and other leaders of faith communities to speak out against xenophobia. It is a deadly cancer, a chilling threat to democracy, and anathema to our religious values. Let "welcome the stranger" ring out from every pulpit: "Bring me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free." This is who we are; this is the United States of America. Immigration is good for our economy, our democracy and our values.

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