

Trump & Co.'s Vile Anti-Immigrationism

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services Director L. Francis Cissna displayed an odious hostility to liberty at a press briefing this week when he tried to associate immigration with terrorism.

“If you have immigrant visa programs where the eligibility criteria are low to nonexistent or even an outright lottery,” Cissna, “you’re not selecting for the types of people that we [sic] want in this country, according to criteria, that will ensure their success in our nation. That will ensure that they will assimilate well.”

I can think of one type of person I’d rather not have in the country — people like Cissna. Who the hell is he or anyone else to participate in a coercive process to “select[] for the types of people” who can live in the territory called the United States? What gives anyone the right to set criteria for that? The country is not a country club requiring membership criteria. Individual property owners of course should be free to set any criteria for selecting who lives or works on *their* property. If someone wants to exclude people from other countries, they should be free to do so without government permission or interference.

But such freedom would necessarily assure that criteria will differ among property owners. Owners with more liberal criteria should also be free to welcome — to their homes, rental properties, and businesses — people from other countries. Those property owners also should not be required to have government permission or be subject to interference. “Anything that’s peaceful,” as Leonard Read put it.

It should not be the government’s prerogative to define and ensure immigrants’ “success” and assimilation. We have zero reason to be confident in the ability of politicians and bureaucrats to predict success, however defined. And whether people assimilate is not the government’s business. The last thing we should want is politicians and bureaucrats managing the culture. We are all immeasurably richer — in all kinds of ways — because many past immigrants did not assimilate, despite bigoted pressure, official and private.

Cissna specifically criticized the lottery, or diversity, visa and chain, or family, migration. Cissna did so because two recent terrorism suspects entered the country through those programs in the immigration law. (For the record, I oppose immigration law because I favor open borders.)

The diversity visa program opens immigration to people with “at least a high school education or at least two years of work experience in an occupation which requires at least two other years of training or experience” who originate in “countries with low rates of immigration to the United States in the previous five years.” Ending the program would

condemn even more people to lifelong poverty than now occurs because of U.S. immigration restrictions.

Cissna says the “low” criteria for qualifying for the lottery make it prone to fraud by terrorists. Of course, he had no data to show the program is a major threat because it isn’t. He would not say that a recent terrorism suspect had something in his background that should have barred his entry. (Sayfullo Habibullaevic Saipov came to the United States from Uzbekistan in 2010.) Cissna instead dismissed well-documented studies showing that immigrants commit fewer crimes than native-born citizens. Lottery visa immigrants aren’t exempt from vetting, though demagogues like Cissna want us to think they are.

His critique of chain migration is equally flawed. (Akayed Ullah came from Bangladesh in 2011.) , First, it’s a “‘contrived term’ that seeks to put a negative light on a phenomenon that has taken place throughout the history of the country,” writes immigration champion Stuart Anderson. Moreover, entry through this program is in no way expedited. “The wait times for sponsoring a close family member are long and, in some cases, extremely long,” Anderson wrote in 2011. “For example, due to the annual limits the State Department is only processing applications for siblings from the Philippines filed prior to August 1988, according to the department’s Visa Bulletin. In other words, American citizens with brothers or sisters in the Philippines who filed while Ronald Reagan was still president and before the Berlin Wall fell are still waiting for their relatives to join them.” Again, chain migration does not mean no vetting.

That the Trump administration wants these program ended is an outrage against decency and liberty. The Trump/Cissna “logic” about potential terrorism would mean no immigration at all.

Cissna emphasized he was not saying recent terrorism suspects were “radicalized” before entering the United States. Had he suggested that were the case, he would have been criticizing the government’s intelligence apparatus, and he clearly did not want to do that.

The concern about so-called radicalization by Muslims in the United States is a red herring intended to make Americans distrust (certain) foreigners and immigration in general. It’s unlikely that someone would become attracted to violence merely by looking at a website that calls for violence. Rather, someone who already believes they have a cause that warrants violence might look at sites that mirror that belief and offer suggestions for action.

Now where might a Muslim in America — or anyone else — come up with a cause that might be pursued violently? How about 24/7 cable news channels and websites that report the U.S. government’s wanton violence throughout the Muslim world? Violence against innocents for political or other reasons is of course inexcusable, but that doesn’t negate the

fact that the news media have the potential to inspire what Trump calls “radical Islamic terrorism.”

So who favors shutting down news channels and sites as an anti-terrorism measure? No hands? I didn’t think so.

Let’s stop scapegoating immigrants.