**Cruel policies**

Juan Carlos Gomez

Monday, Apr 01, 2024

When President Biden was campaigning in 2020, he pledged to strengthen our country by supporting and welcoming immigrants. Early in his presidency, he began taking steps in that direction.

On his first day in office, Biden proclaimed an end to his predecessor’s ‘Muslim ban’, which summarily banned migration from several Muslim-majority countries. And in February 2021, Biden introduced an executive order aimed at reversing some of the Trump administration’s damage to our immigration system, from family separations to backlogs in our asylum system.

“Securing our borders does not require us to ignore the humanity of those who seek to cross them,” Biden said at the time. “Nor is the United States safer when resources that should be invested in policies targeting actual threats, such as drug cartels and human traffickers, are squandered on efforts to stymie legitimate asylum seekers.”

Biden seemed to understand that being ‘tough’ does not mean you have to support cruel and ineffective policies. Unfortunately, as immigration has become a more polarizing topic, the administration has backed away from this more humane approach.

Instead, in many ways Biden has actually continued down Trump’s path on immigration.

For example, the Trump administration enforced a rule called Title 42 during the height of the Covid pandemic, which severely limited entry into the United States – supposedly to protect public health. Biden continued to implement that policy for years, even without the flimsy public health justification.

The bipartisan Senate border bill Biden recently endorsed includes funding for a border wall he once promised not to fund – along with new restrictions on asylum and a measure that would authorize the president to shut the border down completely. Biden is also considering using the same authority the Trump administration invoked in its Muslim ban to restrict asylum access.

A few weeks ago, Biden and Trump separately visited the US-Mexico border. Instead of proposing actual solutions to support our immigration system, Biden uplifted the failed Senate bill – and even went so far as to invite Trump to “join him” in working to it.

During his State of the Union address in March, Biden had the opportunity to distinguish himself from Trump. Instead, his speech demonstrated a strong disconnect between his rhetoric and actions.

Biden said he would not demonize immigrants, but in the same speech used the offensive term ‘illegal immigrant’. No human being is ‘illegal’. Continuing to echo that language is dehumanizing and puts immigrant communities at risk of violence. (Biden later said he regretted using the term, but did not apologize for using it.)

Biden said he would not separate families, but his current and proposed immigration policies have separated and continue to separate families. He said he would not ban people from the country because of their faith, but his proposed action would make asylum harder for nearly everyone regardless of their faith.

Invoking his Irish heritage, Biden has alluded to the Great Famine in Ireland to sympathize with immigrants looking for a better life in the United States. But families seeking shelter today from similar hardship would have extreme difficulty getting into the country under the policies he wants to implement.

Biden once understood that punitive measures were not going to make either immigrants or US citizens safer, or make our immigration system more orderly. He understood that we’d need to create pathways to legislation and citizenship, honor our responsibility to offer refuge to asylum seekers, and live up to our American values.

Excerpted: ‘Cruel Immigration Policies Are Not the Solution’.

Courtesy: Commondreams.org