A Sustainable Environment: Our Obligation to Protect God's Gift

by
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To Control Immigration, Use Systems Thinking Instead of a Wall

The United States is a country that has been built by immigrants from many countries that came here for a better life by working hard. They remained and raised their families who have continued that desire for a great life by obtaining an excellent education and also working hard. Since then, however, it seems that the benefits of life in the U.S. have increased and many more people have become interested in living here. So they come to the U.S. any way possible, even illegally.

Since the majority of the undocumented (illegal) immigrants arrive from Mexico, the Washington administration is planning to build a wall to prevent the flow of illegals into the U.S. However, how effective will a wall be when the majority of the illegal immigrants arrive with a visa and eventually overstay their period of admission? A report by the Center of Migration Studies indicated that over 400,000 immigrants that entered the U.S. with a visa and were to leave by 2015 were still in the U.S. in 2016. This number greatly exceeded those that entered illegally.

If building a wall probably won't work, what is the solution? One possibility is to consider *systems thinking* where the system consists of three kinds of things: elements, interconnections, and a function or purpose. An example of a system is the possible result of a flu virus. A person does not catch the flu, but rather, the person establishes a set of conditions within his/her body that allows the flu virus to flourish within the body. A baseball game consists of players, bats, and a ball (the elements), the rules of the game (interconnections), in an attempt to win the game (purpose). These examples and more can be found in an excellent book titled "Thinking in Systems" by Donella H. Meadows. In her book, she presents the basics of systems, explains why they work, and presents opportunities while making you aware of some traps.

So let's look at this problem of illegal immigration as a system where there is a large gap in the living standards and working opportunities between the U.S. and Mexico. Rather than spending money on border guards, barriers, and/or fences, perhaps we should spend the money helping to build the Mexican economy. This could be done until the illegal immigration stopped – when there no longer would be this great desire for Mexicans to come to the U.S. This system consists of Mexican people (elements), means and barriers to immigrate to the U.S. (interconnections), and the need to have a better life (purpose). Instead of looking at the interconnections, we should be looking at the purpose. By improving the purpose – a better Mexican life – the rest of the system functions without a problem.

So how do we improve the Mexican economy? If a U.S. manufacturing company needs to outsource its production operations, why not provide an incentive to outsource it to Mexico.

According to the Boston Consulting Group, labor rates in Mexico are about 20% lower than in China. So it makes sense for U.S. companies to look towards Mexico for manufacturing of their products. In addition to the lower labor rates, transportation costs to the U.S. would be considerably lower and this would lead to a lower carbon footprint.

In an article I wrote about six years ago, I suggested the development of a universal carbon tax based on the imbedded carbon of all products. Given the electricity production in China using dirty coal technology and the distance to ship products from China to the U.S., the carbon footprint of these products would be much greater than if they were produced in Mexico. A combination of lower labor rates and a lower carbon tax would make products from Mexico much more desirable.

Developing a system to improve the Mexican economy makes much more sense for the control of illegal immigrations than building a wall.   This would not only be a benefit to Mexico, but it would also benefit the work force in the U.S.