

Fresh perspective on value of immigration

OUR OPINION: THEY OFFER LOVE, LOYALTY -- AND THEIR LIVES, TOO

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The voices of intolerance grow more shrill and mean as Congress moves toward immigration reform. Those screaming loudest would have you believe that immigrants come to this country only for welfare benefits and to steal jobs. That fiction found no currency at Monday's Senate hearing in Miami. The day was devoted to acknowledging immigrant contributions to U.S. security.

Born elsewhere

Similar hearings are being held nationwide with a different purpose -- to stir up opposition to sensible, comprehensive reforms as proposed by the Senate. Thus, it was fitting that the Senate Armed Services Committee revisited what immigrants do for this country, not only with their labor, but with their loyalty and lives. Just as fitting was the setting of the hearing in downtown Miami, a city where nearly 60 percent of the residents were born elsewhere. Among the many immigrants attending were Miami Mayor Manny Diaz and Police Chief John Timoney, born, respectively, in Cuba and Ireland.

Marine Gen. Peter Pace, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, stole the show when he spoke about his father, an immigrant from Italy who worked three jobs. Gen. Pace concluded, "No other country in the world offers that kind of opportunity to those who come here."

Other testimony described the courage and commitment of immigrant soldiers:

- **Immigrants** have garnered more than 20 percent of the medals of honor, a disproportionately high number of the nation's highest military award; 101 have been killed in military action since 9/11.
- **Nearly** 25,000 non U.S. citizens now serve on active military duty. More than 26,000 others have earned U.S. citizenship while serving since 9/11.
- **Immigrant soldiers** bring diverse cultural sensitivities and language skills, which are critical in waging global war.
- **High-school** graduates without status must now be turned away by the military. The Dream Act, by allowing students to earn citizenship through college or military service, would dramatically increase the pool of good military recruits.

The House wants an enforcement-only measure, which would be more of what hasn't worked. The Senate's better approach would provide new legal channels for immigration, including allowing immigrants already here to earn their status.

Only comprehensive reform will preserve the immigrant traditions that have enriched the United States. Besides brave soldiers, immigrants have brought new vitality, cultures, ideas, entrepreneurship and an enduring love for America. Congress should remember this when its summer of political theater ends, and it is again faced with delivering meaningful immigration reform.