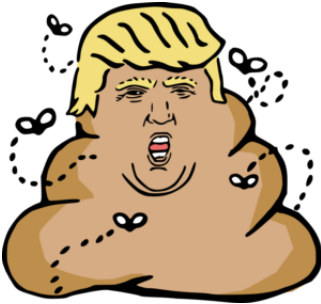


Trump's Shithole Country



Pres*dent Trump

So a couple of days ago our Pres*dent expressed his knowledge of world geography by referring to all African nations, the Central American nation of El Salvador, and the island nation of Haiti, as “shitholes.” This presumably also referred to the people native to those countries, as trump used his “shithole” comment to prove why those people should not be allowed to emigrant to the United States of America.

I have something to say about this.

I know a family who are natives of the Republic of The Gambia, which happens to be an African nation. They have an amazing (to me) life story. The husband grew up on a farm helping his dad, then went to college and earned a degree in Information Technology (IT). He had a girlfriend but wanted his family to live in America. So each year he entered the “Visa Lottery” and after his third annual try won a visa. He emigrated to America and immediately applied for a green card. After two years he earned permanent legal residency. He immediately returned to Gambia and married his girlfriend, then came back to America.

He worked and waited for his five year's minimum residency, then applied for citizenship. Once an American citizen he brought his wife over (in trump's words “chain immigration”) to America. They settled down here and started a family.

Although the husband has an IT degree he started a landscaping business as he loves working with soil and plants. His wife works at a senior citizen center local to their home. As of this writing, they have three lovely children. These honest, hard-working people are among the kindest, most polite people I know; full of life and love.

I know a young woman who is native of the Democratic Republic of The Congo, another African nation. She was adopted by an American family as a minor, through a religious group, and brought to America. At the time she was adopted she was living with her Grandmother as her parents had died. At the age of seventeen she was working full-time at a hotel local to her home and going to college. She later dropped out of college, managed to earn her seaman's card and landed a job on a Cruise Ship as housekeeper. After working on the Cruise Ship for several years she landed a job with an airline as flight attendant. As with the family from Gambia, this young woman is a pure joy to be around. She is full of life and love, a hard worker who lights up the lives of everyone around her.

I've tutored English as Second Language (ESL) students over the past year. My recent student is a young woman (younger than me) who moved here with her husband from the Republic of El Salvador about 20 years ago. I think they may have come here under the El Salvador refugee program but I have never asked. After arriving in America her husband started a roofing business and she started a house cleaning business. neither of them spoke any English when they arrived, and her husband still doesn't. They have four children, all born here in America and all in public schools, and help translate for the parents.

Over the past year my student has gone to a private language school and received tutoring as she needs to learn English for her business and to help her husband. She told me that her first cleaning customer used to keep a Spanish-English dictionary in the house to help communicate. She is a sweet

and hard-working woman, unfailingly polite, and is very proud when she masters another small bit of English.

These are the people I know from the countries trump considers "shitholes." I have a different perspective. The "shitholes" I see include the trump family, and the many people (mostly all Republicans) who are supporting and enabling the trumps. These people are turning our once great United States of America into a "shithole."

We have entire cities of Americans [drinking poisoned water](#) because of Republican policies. We have millions of Americans who [lack electricity and running water](#) months after a hurricane devastated their island, with no relief in sight, because of Republican's neglect. Our nation has the "[highest rate of maternal mortality in the industrialized world.](#)" Our average life expectancy has [declined for the second year in a row.](#) We currently rank [31 in the world](#), above Cuba but below Costa Rica.

Our national railway system is a joke, with our trains derailling at speeds of 30 miles per hour. Meanwhile, over in China, in the space of about ten years that country has developed the most [extensive high-speed railway system in the world](#), with the fastest trains and still improving. Our [infrastructure is close to failing](#), with no serious plans by our Republican-controlled Government to fix it anytime soon.

[Our poverty rate is increasing](#); In 2015, 13.5% (43.1 million) Americans lived below our poverty rate. I won't even get into our children learning "active shooter" drills in grade school, a direct result of NRA-directed Republican policies allowing any psycho access to military-grade weapons. Or that we [experienced 1,156 mass shootings in 1,735 days.](#)

So excuse me, but just maybe trump, his Republican enablers and strap-hangers and sycophants, might want to stop and look around before calling one-third of the world's nations

“shitholes.” We’re not doing a great job of taking care of our own, and our own people are voting with their feet. In 1999 the [US State Department estimated there were between three to six million American’s living abroad](#). In 2016, estimates were nine million Americans had voted with their feet and moved abroad.

We should feel grateful that people of other nations continue to see us as that “Shining City on a Hill,” with Lady Liberty still standing in New York harbor as a global symbol of freedom and hope. I have to wonder how much longer other people will see us that way.

Edited for format and grammar: January 14, 2018

We Are All Immigrants



Statue of Liberty

All four of my grandparents were immigrants. One, my maternal grandfather, entered the US "illegally." Both my first and present wives are immigrants. My first wife left the Philippines during the final years of the Marcos dictatorship, at a time when conditions in that country were rapidly deteriorating.

The decree Pre*ident trump issued this past Friday, blocking all Muslims of seven nations from entering America, deeply and personally offends me.

As I think about what trump's decree means to us as a nation, my insides burn. We are all immigrants from other countries. Our parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, or maybe even further back, packed up everything they could carry and took a chance on traveling to a distant land in the desperate hope they could build a better life for their children. Those people, every one of them, demonstrated more courage than our current pre*ident will ever display or even understand.

I remember Winnie entering America for the first time in Los Angeles International Airport. [After a 20 month struggle](#), she finally obtained her visa on her first try at the US Consulate in Guangzhou and purchased her ticket here the very next day.

Her point of entry was Los Angeles International Airport (LAX), the International terminal. I flew to Los Angeles the day before her arrival and stayed with my brother and family. The next evening we all went down to LAX, arriving about two hours before Winnie's scheduled arrival. Then we waited.

I knew when Winnie's plane had landed and people were clearing customs because of the many Chinese people coming out. So many of them were young women with a baggage cart loaded with cloth bags stuffed full. These were all women like Winnie coming to America to be with their new husbands, seeking a better life, and carrying everything they now owned.

Our identity as Americans are bound up as a nation of

immigrants, a nation that welcomes in the tired, the poor, the huddled masses yearning to breath free. The people of past generations and the people trying to come here today are what our country stands for. This is who we are.

*Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.*

*“Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!” cries she
With silent lips. “Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”*

Emma Lazarus, 1883

No person, even if they happen to temporarily occupy our White House, has the right to deny what America is all about. We as Americans are now facing a test; do we continue to stand for freedom and liberty for all who have the courage to ask? Or do we throw up a wall and hide behind it, quivering in the fear that new immigrants might bring new ideas and new customs and new ways of thinking.

I know on which side I stand.

Some Thoughts On Immigration



Emmigration Around The World in 1885

This past week President Obama went live on prime-time television ([with some notable exceptions](#)) and announced he was directing his cabinets to make some minor changes in the way people who crossed over into our part of planet earth were treated. Notable was that we, a culture that boasts about being a nation of immigrants, would no longer gratuitously tear apart families and deport parents of legal American citizens back to the countries they originated from.

To hear Republicans and Republican-affiliated talking heads on the [usual media outlets loudly protest](#), President Obama has shredded the very fabric of our constitutional government and gone rogue, stomping around the White House smiting his enemies with unilateral actions that defy the will of the people.

To those people loudly hyper-ventilating I say; **Get A Grip.**

The world is not going to end because families will no longer be ripped apart by the heavy hand of overzealous government persecution resulting from political expediency. America as we know it will not be suddenly overrun by hordes of unwashed masses streaming across our southern border as a result of our President's speech. The President's policy firmly reflects our noble American traditions of exploiting new waves of immigrants until they've been around long enough to gain some

political power, at which point they in turn exploit the next wave of immigrants.

I have a unique perspective on immigration. All four of my grandparents were immigrants. My maternal grandmother was from Germany, my maternal grandfather from Holland. My paternal grandparents were from Quebec, Canada. All of them migrated to the United States for better opportunities, survived in spite of the many cultural and legal barriers, overcame exploitation both subtle and overt, and raised children who went on to have better lives than their parents. And so it goes, the same as it always has.

When it comes to "illegal immigration," I also have a somewhat unique perspective. My maternal grandfather was technically "illegal." The family story goes that he was a Dutch merchant sailor who left his ship and settled in New York City sometime after World War I. During World War II he had to leave his family in New York and go up to Canada for two years so he could re-enter America legally and gain his residency papers.

My first (ex-) wife entered the United States on a cultural exchange visa and stayed on when it expired. She was an "illegal immigrant" when we married in 1986, a fact I was well aware of at the time. After our marriage we filed her immigration paperwork with the aid of a local attorney who did exploit us in the process (A few months after that wife gained legal residency the lawyer was indicted for fraud). During our residency interview the immigration officer read me the full gamut of legal penalties over engaging in fraudulent marriage, then gave up when he realized I wasn't intimidated. My wife gained her legal residency, then several years later gained full citizenship and started voting.

It was in fact a different world then.

My present wife, Winnie, entered this country legally as my wife. After an [Internet courtship](#) I traveled to China, we

married, then I came back home and filed for her spousal visa while she waited in China. [The visa process took 20 months](#) and direct intervention by the office of Senator Thad Cochran (R-MS). It was a brutal, emotionally exhausting process, that could have easily wrecked our new marriage. I am not ashamed to say that if I had known in advance how horrible the process of gaining Winnie's visa was going to be I would have moved to China instead. After gaining Winnie's visa I would never fault anybody who does not comply with the dysfunctional farce of bureaucracy that constitutes our present immigration process.

Winnie is now an American citizen who votes.

For those people screaming about "illegal immigrant," I remind them about the [Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882](#), which was all about banning Chinese nationals from coming to America, after earlier Chinese immigrants helped build our first transnational railway line and other early national infrastructure projects. Later immigration laws were also about setting quotas or outright bans on various ethnic groups and nationalities of people wishing to come to America, quotas and bans which reflected the prevailing public prejudices and stereotypes. First it was Asian peoples, then southern European peoples, and now Hispanic peoples.

No, the current wave of Hispanic immigrants will continue to take on jobs native-born Americans don't want while being subtly and overtly exploited through wage theft; exposed to dangerous work conditions; restricted by a a myriad of laws and cultural barriers that control where they can live; and they will survive in conditions of poverty by American standards but which are still better conditions than the places they emigrated from. The only real difference President Obama's new immigration rules create is that fewer Hispanic families will be torn apart by family members getting sent back to the places they left, leaving their American-based family members in even worse abject poverty.

I can live with this change. It's not much, but given the current xenophobia of one of our two major political parties, and the spinelessness of our other major political party, this is presently the best we can hope for. As an optimist, I still believe that someday America will live up to its stated delusion of being that "[Shining City Upon A Hill](#)."

We're not there yet.

Editors Note: Cross Posted On [Daily Kos – Some Thoughts On Immigration](#)

Eighty Percent OK With Discrimination



Letters To The Editor

Awhile back, I submitted a column to our local newspaper, now named "[InsideNoVa.com](#)," formerly "The Potomac News." My column submission was triggered by a report that about 80 percent of Prince William County were "OK" with the way our police department were handling the anti-Hispanic immigration resolution passed by our Board of County Supervisors back in 2007.

I was deeply offended by this information, and submitted my

column.

This column is reprinted as submitted.

An August fourth news article in "The Potomac News," "[Report: Most Prince William residents OK with local immigration policy](#)" reported that 80.5 percent of Prince William County residents surveyed are OK with the way immigration policy is being enforced by our county police. The article cited findings from an interim report by the Police Executive Research Forum, which had been commissioned by our police department to conduct a two-year study on the immigration resolution and its effects on our community.

This immigration resolution would be the one our Republican Chairman of the Board of County Supervisors (BOCS), Cory Stewart, whipped up back in 2007. It initially required our police to check the residency status of anyone detained or pulled over during traffic stops, if the officer believed that person was living in the United States illegally. At the time, it was no secret that the policy was aimed directly at our Hispanic population. Mr. Stewart's apparent close personal advisor Mr. Greg Letiecq, founder of "Help Save Manassas" and recognized by the Southern Poverty Law Center as a nativist, made the anti-Hispanic intent quite clear.

While reading the August fourth article, I wondered who the 19.5 percenters are who are not OK with the way police are enforcing this policy. The demographics of our county provide a clue. U.S. Census Bureau data shows that as of 2007 our Hispanic population was 19.2 percent. Another clue comes from an article in "The Potomac News" of July 29, 2009, "[Family: Police used excessive force at baptism party](#)".

As reported, police in the Manassas area were called in at 8:00 PM on a Sunday evening to quiet down a noisy baptism party hosted by a Hispanic family. Accounts of what happened next vary with the teller. However, when all was done the

police had tasered an unarmed – pregnant – woman three times, and then arrested her for assaulting an officer. The police also arrested the grandfather of the baptized children for being drunk in his own backyard. At last report, that man was still being held while the police checked his immigration status as per Mr. Stewart's anti-immigration policy.

One finding cited in the interim report is "local Hispanics developed an increasingly negative view of police after the resolution was passed." I can't imagine why.

I think everyone who lived in this county back in 2007 can remember the hysteria whipped up by Mr. Stewart over "illegal immigration." Coincidentally timed for the election cycle, Mr. Stewart apparently decided that our "illegal" Hispanic population was just about the biggest threat to peace and prosperity our county had ever encountered; something had to be done about it; and he was just the person to take it on.

Defined by the mindless bumper-sticker slogan "Illegal is Illegal," Mr. Cory made immigration policy the cornerstone of his re-election campaign. He was so concerned about knowing what county residents really wanted, on the night the BOCS were taking public comments on his proposed policy Mr. Stewart slipped away for an interview with CNN.

The immigration issue has quieted down considerably this past year. One reason could be that the Republican-dominated BOCS has been busy dealing with the impact of financial disasters bequeathed to us by the former Bush Administration. An alternate reason could be that the Republican Party has begun to realize that demonizing one of the largest and fastest growing demographic populations in the U.S. is not particularly effective in winning their vote. Whatever.

I suspect the 19.5 percent of our population who are not OK with the way Mr. Stewart's immigration policy is being enforced tend to be Hispanic, along with some non-Hispanic

people who deeply object to the way our laws are seemingly being used to discriminate against an entire population. You can include me among this latter group.

Needless to say, my column was never published. The editor, Alex Granados indicated that it “had promise,” but that was it. It should also go without saying that I remain opposed to the immigration “resolution,” consider it discrimination, and remain offended that 80 percent of my fellow Prince William County residents think discrimination is OK.

The Anatomy of an On-Line Discussion Thread



Letters To The Editor

Wherein I Get Called a Traitor with 5 !'s After Eight Short Posts

I've made a point of getting a Letter to the Editor (LTE) of our local newspaper published at least once each month since last summer. Over these past months my writing has evolved from simple rebutting of our local Conservative columnists to writing on original topics. Part of the change from rebutting columnists is that the newspaper has introduced commenting in

their on-line version. This on-line commenting is moderated but apparently only filtered for obvious spam, as evidenced by the range of opinions that actually gets posted.

A comments thread I participated in became extremely amusing to me extremely fast today. Unfortunately, it is also a sad example of what now-a-days passes for “educated discussion” on immigration in this Virginia county of Prince William.

This thread started, as all threads do, with a LTE. This particular LTE was titled;

“There is not enough room for all to come.”

It started out discussing three recent LTEs all published the same day on “Illegal Immigration.” The writer worked through and commented on each, giving his personal views relative to each particular letter. The first letter he commented on was written by a Ms. Johnson-Firth, who wrote in favor of rationality in dealing with local immigration issues. The writer closed with this paragraph:

“Being an American is a fortunate privilege and while it would be nice if all six billion of our neighbors could enjoy America as we do, the fact is there just isn’t room and we have the right and responsibility to determine who we admit and under what circumstances. “

Reading that ticked me off, as it directly relates to our family history. All four of my grandparents were immigrants, and my maternal Grandmother entered the US through Ellis Island and the Hall of Immigration. Our family story is that her parents sent her to the US at the age of 16, shortly after WWI when the German economy was collapsing and there seemed to be little future for her there. My grandmother entered the US as a teenager, not able to speak any English, no money, and little education other than her training and skills as a

seamstress, with her biggest asset being a determination to build a life for herself in America.

As a guess, I would say my maternal Grandmother would today be a person the writer of this LTE considered "undesirable." So, I started off the comments thread with this post:

Posted by (RonCharest) on May 11, 2008 at 9:27 am

Well, that settles it. We certainly don't need that towering pile of moldering copper sitting smack dab in the middle of New York Harbor anymore:

"The New Colossus

*Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch,
whose flame Is the imprisoned lightning,
and her name Mother of Exiles.
From her beacon-hand Glows world-wide welcome;
her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.
"Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!"
cries she With silent lips.
"Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"
Emma Lazarus, 1883"*

My thread was quickly followed by a series of regular commentators, most of whom would be Conservative and with whom I've sparred with on occasion:

Posted by (###) on May 11, 2008 at 12:01 pm

Mr. Grassilli:

Ms. Johnson-Firth makes a living off the backs of legal and illegal immigrants, so her stance is predictable. You should see how many of these lawyers are handing out business cards at police community outreach meetings. It is one stop shopping for all who are illegal immigrants. Mr. Westoff, in previous letters has never supported the Rule of Law Resolution, so his comments are predictable as well as politically motivated. The Democratic party in our county doesn't support the resolution.

Chairman Stewart, and Supervisors Caddigan, Covington, and Stirrup should be commended for wanting to preserve law and order in Prince William County. These supervisors are looking out for the best interests of all of our citizens.

Then, in quick succession, we had two posts in succession from the same person. This person is also a regular commentator and normally takes the same positions as I do, but is also sometimes a bit wild in their writing:

Posted by (###) on May 11, 2008 at 3:12 pm

do the right thing: what is this "law and order" PWC BOCS goons are trying to preserve? Sure, there are law breakers among illegals just as there are among citizens.

Mr. Charist, maybe we could replace the statue with one of Steewart, Letiecq, HSM, et al – and build some sort of fence. Maybe we could become the n. American "Burma".

Posted by (###) on May 11, 2008 at 9:37 pm

The country is not big enough for you and me, and all I care about is me.

Then we had another Conservative commentator, whom I consider

to be normally close to the border but still on the reservation.

Posted by (###) on May 12, 2008 at 4:12 am

Ron Charest where in the "New Colossus" does it say that illegal aliens are welcome? Would you invite a criminal inside your house knowing that he or she was a criminal? As for only caring about me, I would assume that ### is profiting off the backs of illegal low cost workers and or their illegal votes.

Meanwhile, the comment about "a statue of steewart" got me to thinking, and I posted my response:

Posted by (RonCharest) on May 12, 2008 at 7:58 am

I think you're on to something there, suggesting a statue to Stewart and Letiecq et al. I'm thinking perhaps a 300 foot representation of a person carrying submachine guns and various other armaments symbolizing a vigilante, made out of razor wire and concrete barricades.

I think that would pretty much represent the America these sorry people want to live in.

After posting, I spotted the earlier post about "New Colossus" welcoming illegals. So, I did my research, and posted my reply:

Posted by (RonCharest) on May 12, 2008 at 9:40 am

I suggest you read up on the history of immigration visas and immigration restrictions. Immigration quotas and visa requirements in the US only started with the Immigration Act of 1924, or Johnson-Reed Act, including the National Origins Act, Asian Exclusion Act. Restrictions and prohibitions on Asians started with the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which

was the first time the US set restrictions on who could migrate into the US. It was further extended in 1917 by excluding more Asian groups.

Of note, the 1924 act first defined the term "Immigrant." Besides specifically excluding all people from specific Asian nations, it set quota limits on people from European nations, but set No Limits on immigration from Latin America (which included Mexico).

All these laws are now commonly considered to have been driven by nativist and xenophobic sentiments of the people at that time.

So the Statue of Liberty does not have any fine print on the bottom of the poem "New Colossus" as at the time she was set out in New York Harbor, we were still a nation that had not defined "Illegal Immigrants."

If you want to go after me, you need to do your homework first.

Ref:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immigration_Act_of_1924

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immigration_Act_of_1917

Still a rational enough discussion, I thought. But then, another local Conservative jumped in with their thoughts. This particular commentator is always on top of every article on immigration and always quite predictable in offering their completely-off-the-reservation rabid right-wing opinions:

Posted by (###) on May 12, 2008 at 9:46 am

& roncharest,

Are you two on the same floor over there at St Elizabeth's? There is a floor there especially for Traitor mental patients such as you guys. I know it hurts to be on the losing side

but you have to stop crying at some point and move on or out of the county. Again Cindy Sheehan will be going to visit with Fidel and Hugo soon. They have room for both of you Anti-American nut cases. As far as education, your writings reflect your 3rd grade education at best. Hey did you see the Washington Post article about families moving into PW County? One particular family moved here because of the crackdown on illegal immigrants. She stated that it would be much safer community to raise her daughters. But that's right, you guys would rather have all the illegal murdering, raping, hit & run trash living here vice nice American Families. TRAITORS!!!!

I'm assuming "St Elizabeth's" the writer referred to is a local mental hospital, but I'm not sure. One could guess that this particular writer has more knowledge of the place than I do. I did, of course, add my final comment just to keep the pot stirred:

Posted by (RonCharest) on May 12, 2008 at 10:52 am

As I've written in previous threads; In any argument, the person screaming the loudest is usually the most wrong. I think anyone reading this thread can tell who is the "loudest" and most hysterical about now.

Of course, no one could have predicted that from here, the discussion thread degenerated into mostly a "Neener, neener, neener, bla bla bla" type of discussion. I didn't add any more comments.

So there you have it. An anatomy of what the local Conservatives (aka: wingnuts) consider to be rational intelligent debate on a matter of vital national urgency; keeping short brown-skinned Spanish-speaking people out of sight of regular Americans here in lovely Prince William County, Virginia.

The hypocrisy of Illegal is Illegal



Letters To The Editor

I've just had another of my continuing series of Letters to the Editor published in yesterday's "[The Potomac News](#)". This letter was another in my recent series of taking on the anti-Hispanic-immigration crowd that is running wild here in Prince William County.

The rallying banner that seemingly justifies discrimination and persecution of our local Hispanic community seems to be settling on the slogan "Illegal is Illegal." The publicized meaning is that once a person enters our country "Illegally," (i.e.: Without the proper visa) than there should be no barriers towards harassing and persecuting them back to their native country.

Fair enough, but my problem has been with the flip side of this equation; if no one was illegally hiring undocumented workers, the workers wouldn't be here.

So I wrote another [letter](#):

Am I the only person who notices the hypocrisy of the "illegal is illegal" anti-immigration crowd? The same set of

USCIS rules and regulations that require an immigrant to have work authorization in the form of a special visa also prohibits Americans from hiring people without work authorization.

In other words; It is illegal for a resident of Prince William County to hire a person who is not authorized to work in this country.

I have to wonder how many county residents demanding to have all "illegal-immigrants" arrested and deported are meanwhile hiring "illegals" for labor at below-market wages? I wonder if our Prince William County residents hiring "illegal-immigrants" abide by labor laws and deduct federal and state income tax withholding, Social Security taxes, Medicare and workman's comp insurance?

I do have concerns about the number of people living and working in this county without proper visas. My concerns revolve around the basic human rights of receiving fair wages and treatment for an honest day's work. Under the present toxic environment, created in no small part by the actions of people including Corey Stewart and Greg Letiecq, receiving these basic human rights are probable at best for thousands in our county.

In my opinion, based upon my observations, Mr. Stewart, Mr. Letiecq and others of that crowd are merely using the excuse of "illegal Immigration" to promote discrimination and advance their personal careers. Instead of working to bring our community together, they have divided us. By demagoging our Hispanic community, Mr. Stewart and his enablers have wasted millions of our tax dollars at a time when the county is struggling to fund basic services, filled up the county jails with non-violent "criminals," decimated local businesses, and badly damaged the reputation of our community across the United States. All done under the banner of "illegal is illegal."

Yet nothing is being done about our fellow citizens breaking the law by illegally hiring undocumented workers. I have to wonder: why?

Recently, "The Potomac News" added a comments feature to their on-line edition. While I've been busy adding my comments to other letters, columns, and news articles, I've also had other writers comment at me. Their comments to my letter have been most interesting. I've posted excerpts here.

First, a middle of the road "why can't we all work together" comment:

Many PWC residents enjoy the financial savings when bypassing professional companies by using a private house cleaning services or Jose and his boys for mulching and lawn service. It is somehow wrong for a construction company to use off-book labor but for a private homeowner to have a crew work the weekend side job reroofing their home for cash is ok. [...] there is no pure black or white side of these issues but many shades of gray we need to accept and work together on to find a solution.

Of course, someone had to defend our local racist Greg Letiecq:

If you knew anything about Greg Letiecq, other than what this newspaper spoon feeds you, then you'd know he's absolutely and for prosecuting those that use illegal labor.

Funny that I sure don't see these folks out picketing local businesses that hire "Illegals," calling for boycotts, or complaining that the USCIS has not been fining the owners of business raided for hiring undocumented workers.

Then, I obviously made someone uncomfortable:

HUH??? Whew, what porous reasoning. From my experience the 'illegal is illegal' crowd actually is supportive of immigration policy. It is the avoidance and evasion of that policy they are against [...] The writers underlying point is well taken however, in that we do need to heavily fine and penalize companies that knowingly hire illegals. [...]

So I have a valid basis to my porous reasoning? Whatever.

Here is someone else I appear to have made uncomfortable enough to go into denial:

[...] As for mr charest, I think he is confusing local citizens with local employers. Most citizens are actually afraid to swing by the local 7/11 and pick up a truck load of men they cannot conversate with and take them to their home. If a citizen hires a legal contractor that employs illegals, that is not the fault of the citizen. [...]

I guess the local employers are not local citizens.

I did receive one supportive comment:

No Ron Charest, you are not the only one, Mexico sin fronteras is with you, the Mexican consulate, Casa de Maryland, The council of la Raza they all are with you.

So, I guess it's nice to know that if I continue to run my mouth and get enough letters published to really annoy someone, I can probably find asylum in Mexico.

Yo Hablo Español

"Everyone who comes to America should learn to speak English." If I only had a nickel for every time I heard this idealistic statement. This statement might work in a perfect world, but our world is far from perfect.

My interest in learning the Spanish language began several years ago. My husband and I were involved with all aspects of traffic safety and received a government grant to open a bilingual traffic safety education site for Spanish speaking immigrants; many who are driving cars without a license, etc. Our hopes were to make our community safer for both English and Spanish speaking residents. Sadly, the plans had to be scrapped when our supervisor resigned from his job due to an unrelated matter.

My husband plans to retire in a few years and we are thinking of going into the traffic safety field part time with this same mission in mind. Once again, we are making the effort to become fluent in Spanish.

Our local library provided the Rosetta Stone program on-line for residents to use at home at their convenience. Languages offered included English, Spanish, French, Chinese, Italian, German, etc. It is a fantastic program requiring no translation. It shows images with spoken and written language, much the same way we learned to talk as preschool children. Unfortunately, the Rosetta Stone Company cancelled our library's on-line subscription service.

Our library is now providing us with Mango also a multi-language program. This program does not use images but focuses more on grammar, much like a child's early years in elementary school. Having used both programs, I find they actually complement each other. Hopefully, our library will continue to provide the community with this service. It could

get costly for residents if we had to buy these programs on our own. Some of the poorer residents might be forced to stop learning a second language altogether if this happened.

My biggest inspiration for reviewing Spanish occurred a few months ago while accompanying my husband to the doctor's office for a procedure requiring anesthesia. There was a Spanish man there for the same reason as my husband. This man spoke no English and had no English speaking relative or friend with him during this particular visit.

After his procedure, he could not understand why he could not drive back to work. The doctor's Spanish was more limited than mine, so I intervened and told this patient, "No va en el coche hoy." Maybe not grammatically correct Spanish but I made him understand he could not drive for the rest of the day. His look of gratitude gave me new energy to continue learning this language.

As far as I am concerned, Spanish immigrants are the new kids on the block in this country, doing many jobs English speaking citizens will no longer do. Yes I believe these immigrants should be legalized, but this is not going to happen unless we can understand each other and establish some trust. Only then will there be a chance of smooth transition.

Learning a foreign language is easier for some than others. For those of us able to do this, let us step up to the plate and learn. The world is not perfect and life is unfair. But a little "*Understanding*" can alleviate a lot of misconception and anger.

<http://www.rosettastone.com/>

<http://www.mangolanguages.com/>

Look Into The Mirror



Letters To The Editor

A few weeks ago I had another of my letters to the Local Newspaper "The Potomac News" published. This letter expressed my lack of sympathy towards one of our most out-spoken racists complaining about being listed in the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) as a "nativist."

My letter received a direct letter to the editor rebuttal only two days later. My follow-up was never published by "The Potomac News," so I'm publishing it here.

My [letter](#), published March 24, pointedly expressed a lack of sympathy for our own Greg Letiecq, a piece of work who is very proud of his discriminatory stance towards our local Hispanic population. At least, he was proud, until the SPLC listed him. Then [Letiecq shed great amounts of tears](#) over the unfairness of it all and even threatened to sue anyone else who called him a "Nativist."

Kind of like what I'm doing right now.

My letter received an immediate (by newspaper publishing standards) response from a Ms. Cynthia Higginbottom on March 26. Her letter "[Do some research on the SPLC](#)" starts:

Mr. Charest, I have a question for you: Did you wife come here legally or illegally? I am sure that Mr. Letiecq and others who share his opinions are all for immigration; they

are against illegal immigration.

Why can't you and others who share your beliefs understand that?

Then she goes on to attacking the SPLC. I'm not sure, but I think her position is that the SPLC has a hard-liner stance against racism and discriminatory policies. I thought that was the whole purpose of the SPLC, but, whatever.

I wrote a follow-up letter that was careful not to directly attack Ms. Higginbottom, but attempted to use her questions towards me in making a larger point about the whole "Illegal is Illegal" nonsense spewed by Letiecq, County Board of Supervisors head Cory Stewart, and their minions and straphangers. My letter was never published. As I've waited a reasonable amount of time, I'm going to publish it here:

On Monday, March 24, this newspaper was kind enough to publish another of my letters. This letter expressed my lack of sympathy towards Mr. Letiecq's complaints of his treatment at the hands of the Southern Poverty Law Center and local newspapers, as expressed in his March 18 column. In a letter by Ms. Higginbottom published March 26, she asked me two questions in support of her claim that Mr. Letiecq only opposes "illegal" immigration, not "legal."

There is a larger point I wish to make as response to Ms Higginbottom.

The actions of Cory Stewart, Greg Letiecq, and others have already created an atmosphere of hostility towards everyone and anyone guilty of Speaking-English-With-An-Accent. Those of us in Prince William County, who are immigrants, and their immediate families, live with the impact of this hostility. In my opinion, based upon my observations, Mr. Stewart, Mr. Letiecq, and others are merely using "illegal immigration" as a cover for discrimination and a means of advancing their

political careers.

People who are here “illegally” performing unskilled labor are working here because they can support their families far better than by working in their native country. In fact the USCIS offers no option for an unskilled-labor visa other than one subcategory of the EB-3, which is advertised as having “a many years wait.” The H-2B is only for seasonal or temporary work with no path for permanent residency, and has an annual limit on number of issues. Gaining a visa through family-sponsorship requires having immediate family already living in America, then waiting years and spending thousands of dollars.

So, I will answer Ms Higginbottom’s questions to me with a question to all residents of Prince William County; have you ever paid an “illegal immigrant” to work for you? If “Yes,” then you only need look in a mirror to see the reason people violate our immigration regulations. The solution then becomes apparent.

It really is that simple.

I’m going to write another letter, attempting to make the same point in a different way.

On Being Inspired



Reach For The Stars

I've written recently about the issues of immigration here and the attitudes of far too many residents in Prince William County. The attitude can be summed up in the statement "There're against it." At least, they're against Hispanic immigrants who have the temerity to actually expect to be treated as human beings in exchange for doing a large portion of the manual labor around these parts.

Last night, I was privileged to be among a large group of Hispanic people who respected me, just having a good time celebrating their achievements.

This past January I started volunteering to teach English as Second Language (ESL) through the Hogar Hispano program, run by the Catholic Charities program. Our particular program teaches English to adult students. The semester started in late January and finished last night. Even though I normally feel very comfortable in front of a classroom, teaching ESL proved far more challenging than I expected.

For one, during the course of this semester I changed jobs twice, with all the stress and strain that changing jobs involves (hint; it's not particularly pleasant). Changing jobs was distracting and prevented me from getting any kind of routine. The one thing I like about how the Hogar Hispano program is run here, is that a volunteer instructor is only asked to teach one night each week, even though there are two classes per week. I ended up with Monday nights as it didn't seem to make a difference either way with my work schedule.

I also quickly learned that teaching English to people, who can't actually already speak English, when I can't speak their native language, is rather difficult. For one, the students don't understand my jokes (probably good), instructions to open their books to a certain page, or definitions of words they ask me to explain. I was fortunate in that I was assigned to an "Intermediate-Level" class, so they had some limited English skills already.

The program provides "Teacher Training," which for me was an hour and a half's worth the week before the first class. Not enough.

To add to my general teaching stress, Winnie ended up in my class for the last several sessions. We actually first heard about the program as an option for Winnie to take English classes again, and I then I heard the program needed volunteer teachers. Winnie was originally assigned to the advanced class, but near the end of the semester convinced herself that she was in a class too advanced for her. So she ended up as one of my students.

So, for the past three months, as I've jumped around new jobs and new work locations, I've been attempting to teach ESL to my wife and a room full of other people who mostly only speak Spanish. I guess I did a passable job of it, overall. The students seemed to respect me and were very gracious in thanking me at the end of each evening's class.

Last night was our "graduation" night. We had a potluck dinner party (I spent a bit of time during the semester explaining the concept of "Pot Luck"), and then the program organizers handed out certificates.

It follows that Hispanic people way outnumbered non-Hispanics during our dinner. Several of the instructors are also Hispanics who happen to be fluent in English. So, I spent most of the evening sampling foods I'd never tasted before and

just enjoying watching other people party in Spanish. Some of the adult students brought their children, making it an even more enjoyable celebration.

Certificates were handed out to all the students. The all of us instructors were invited up to the front of the room, given our own certificates of thanks and a round of applause from our students.

Watching the crowd, I couldn't help thinking about what it really meant to our students. Here, these people are all working hard all day with manual labor jobs making little money. Some have families with them, some are on their own with families back in their home country they're supporting. They all know the hostility from way too many locals, know that just one mistake could get them sent to jail en-route to being deported back to their home country (whether they're here with or without a visa).

Yet, somehow, they find time and energy to come to an evening class and study a second language as adults, as their way of adapting to a different culture. For all their hard work at low wages, all the hardships I know they've had to deal with living and working here, I saw no bitterness anywhere. Last night they were a bunch of people partying and having a good time, enjoying a small accomplishment.

For all the thanks my students offered me last night, I couldn't help but feel I owed them thanks. Watching them, I felt inspired.

No Sympathy for Racists



Letters To The Editor

Last week I submitted another of my on-going series of Letters to the Editor of our local newspaper "[The Potomac News](#)." This time, I took on a local wing-nut who is key in whipping up anti-immigration hysteria in this area. It seems that after a few years of diligently and successfully working to build his reputation as a local racist, this individual was unhappy about being labeled a "nativist" by the Southern Poverty Law Center and local newspapers.

Greg Letiecq is a real piece of work. He runs a local blog titled "Black Velvet Bruce Li" (I will not link to it) which he uses as his platform to spout racist comments against Hispanics and pretty much anyone he disagrees with. He's been one of the key figures in getting local "anti-illegal-immigration" laws passed which is actually legislated discrimination. He's also helped to start several local organizations which are thinly veiled covers for discriminatory efforts against Hispanic in particular and brown-skinned people in general.

Recently the [Southern Poverty Law Center](#) listed this Greg Letiecq as a "nativist." To the great credit of our local news organizations, they picked right up on this and published several stories and opinion pieces pretty negative against Letiecq.

After all his hard work one would think Letiecq would wear the title of “Nativist” with pride, or at most, annoyed that he didn’t earn a stronger racist label. But some people just can’t handle success. Letiecq published an angry rebuttal column “[Letiecq Fights Back](#)” on March 18. In his column he complained about the unfairness of being accused of not liking brown-skinned people, slammed brown-skinned people, and then threatened lawsuits against anyone who continued to claim he didn’t actually like brown-skinned people. Great column, actually.

As I have a dog in this fight (that’s a southern term for you Yankees), I dropped in my \$.02 worth of opinion. My letter “[Little Sympathy For Letiecq From Reader](#)” was published March 24 as follows:

As the husband of an immigrant (Chinese) wife, living in Prince William County, I read Greg Letiecq’s column “Letiecq fights back” of March 18 with great interest but little sympathy.

The American Heritage Dictionary defines “nativism” as: “A sociopolitical policy, especially in the United States in the 19th century, favoring the interests of established inhabitants over those of immigrants.”

A search on the Southern Poverty Law Center’s (SPLC) Web site (<http://www.splcenter.org>) reveals what they actually published about Mr. Letiecq.

The SPLC’s 410 word entry credits Mr. Letiecq as operator of one of the most popular local anti-immigration blogs “Black Velvet Bruce Li.”

The SPLC states that on his blog, Mr. Letiecq refers to day-labor centers as “open-air toilets” and describes Latino pro-immigrant activists as “mobs of machete-wielding radicals wearing ski masks” who are part of a global “Zapatista” conspiracy that also includes “burning cars in the suburbs of

Paris.”

The SPLC entry states Mr. Letiecq formed “Help Save Manassas” in April 2007, and credits Mr. Letiecq as co-author of the Prince William County ordinance which severely limits the access of immigrants to public benefits. The SPLC also credits Mr. Letiecq for branding the “Help Save” moniker and helping to establish six spin-off groups in Virginia (“Help Save” Fairfax, Hampton Roads, Herndon, Loudon, Stafford and Old Dominion) and one in Maryland.

I guess it is to Mr. Letiecq’s credit that he is unhappy with being listed as a nativist by a group internationally recognized for its tolerance education programs, its legal victories against white supremacists and its tracking of hate groups.

Perhaps, instead of threatening lawsuits against those who publish the facts about him, Mr. Letiecq should use his influence to promote the Christian values of tolerance and American values of equal opportunity for all. Then the SPLC would not have a reason to list him.

So there it is. My foray into the immigration hysteria that I consider to be the background environment of the problems Winnie and I had with the [local DMV](#) and the [visiting home nurse](#) incident last spring.

After living 13 years in southern Mississippi, I really thought I’d be getting away from the ignorance and subtle racism of the south by moving north. I actually did, sort of. Instead of the subtle racism of Mississippi, I’m now dealing with the open racism of a state that in 1967 fought all the way to the US Supreme Court to defend states rights in prohibiting interracial marriages ([Loving v. Virginia](#)). This is also the state where in 1954, when the activist liberal Supreme Court judges struck down segregated schools ([Brown v Board of Education](#)) some counties actually closed all public

schools rather than integrate.

Oh well. Just another day in the trenches.

Follow-up: I seem to have gathered a lot of attention with my letter. The online edition of the Potomac News now offers moderated comments, and my letter has gathered several interesting ones.

Follow-up: On March 26, the Potomac News published a letter "[Do Some Research on the SPLC](#)" in which the writer, one Cynthia Higgenbottom, questioned me by name as to Winnie's legal immigration status, questioned whether I understood that Letiecq was only opposed to "illegal immigration," and then went on to slam the SPLC. If I understand her position on the SPLC correctly, she was slamming them for taking a hard line stand against discriminatory behavior. I thought that was the whole purpose of the SPLC, but, whatever.

I did write another LTE in response, not challenging Ms Higgenbottom, but using her letter to really step up my position on the local hysteria against "illegals." I'll wait a week or so before publishing this letter, to give the Potomac News a chance to publish first (if they do).