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House Republicans' bias will prevent continue of comprehensive immigration reform

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Last week, the Senate passed with a strong majority the comprehensive immigration reform act. Several Republicans supported the measure, though a majority of them opposed it. The real question is what happens now in the House of Representatives.

At this point, it does not look good for the House to support the Senate bill or anything close to it. Most Republicans in the House cite border security as the key issue for them. Despite the billions of dollars included in the Senate bill for additional border patrol personnel, a 700-mile fence, use of drones to patrol the border, a broader e-verify system, etc., these Republicans are still not satisfied.

The fact of the matter is that border security is not really the chief concern of these House members. In my opinion, what they are really concerned about is the character and background of the immigrants themselves. What they object to is that these mostly Latino immigrants, including the undocumented, are not the right kind of immigrants. They are too non-Caucasian, too non-English-speaking and too poor. They believe such immigrants represent a direct threat to American society as they interpret it. They believe such immigrants have no intention of becoming Americans and, in fact, want to establish their own Spanish-speaking society and culture and impose it on the rest of American society.

These are nativist and racist perceptions that have little to do with reality. It is also based on an ahistorical view of the history of Latinos in the United States. As a historian of the Chicano/Latino experience, I know these are false views. Mexican immigrants, for example, have been crossing into the United States for decades beginning in the early 20th century, and they have come to work, work and work. They have come to assist their families, and in doing so, they have contributed to America's wealth. Their children have largely been born in the United States, have grown up here and have attempted to be accepted as full-blown Americans despite the racial and ethnic discrimination that they have historically faced.

There has been nothing un-American or anti-American among Mexican immigrants and their children, their grandchildren and their great-grandchildren. In all of this country's wars, Latino blood has been shed for this country. But ignorance, fear, stereotyping and to be truthful, genuine American racism has distracted from this history, and this unfortunately affects the immigration reform debate -- or what passes as debate in Congress.

Make no mistake about it, the tea party Republicans and other archconservative groups are opposed to immigration reform because of their racism toward Latinos in general and not just immigrants. Border security is just a nativist shield for this racism.

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