

## EXPLORING IMMIGRATION

### Module 3 – Immigration Growth: Economic Problems or Prosperity

[ANYTHING HIGHLIGHTED IN RED IS ADDED IN REVISION #1]

SPEAKER It's a beautiful day to become a citizen. 00:00:54

[CROWD CLAPPING 00:00:57]

NARRATOR As the debate rages about immigration numbers, the Latino population surges; and with it comes political power that will influence any proposed changes in our immigration law and policies. 00:01:27

MAN #1 In the 1990's, the immigrant population grew by 40%, which was on top of a 40% increase in the 1980's; so there's been a significant increase in immigration over the past 10 years. But in addition to that, immigration is spreading, is dispersing across the country in a way that has never happened in the past. 00:01:48

The top immigrant states, California, New York, Florida, Texas, are still the top immigrant states. But because of the concentration of immigration, immigrants are now fleeing immigration by moving to new places, looking for less job competition, less crowded schools, what have you. 00:02:07

MAN #2 In the early '90's, the American people became very, very concerned about the dramatic changes in immigration that had happened over the last 20 years. And part of it was that we had a recession in the early '90's, people started realizing that we could – we're bringing in unprecedented levels of foreign workers at the same time that we had a recession going on. And secondly we had the World Trade Center bombing of 1993. 00:02:31

Immigration at these massive numbers is a fundamental tool of economic disparity and economic injustice in our society that damages the most vulnerable members of our society. The very people that our government should be protecting are being damaged by this immigration policy. 00:02:48

MAN #3 Immigration is a major source of population growth for this country, no question about it. In fact, we probably have declining population if it weren't for immigration, which I think would be a bad thing not a good thing. 00:02:59

People say well immigrants are having too many kids. There's no question that immigrants have a higher fertility rate than American born. I think immigrants are really an important component to keeping America number one. 00:03:12

We get a lot of brain power. We get some of the hardest working people in the world to come here. You know it's not as if we get a random sample of people from the world who come here. We – one of the reasons immigration is so important to America is that the people who tend to come uproot themselves, leave their hometown and go to a foreign country. Those are risk takers. They are people who are highly motivated. 00:03:35

MAN #4 The general has always been for free men and free markets, and the essence of that is the belief that each additional person in a free society contributes to a bigger pie. So on the specifics of immigration there probably been various differences along the way, but on the general principle that "the more the merrier," I think it's a consistent principle. 00:03:55

It's certainly been consistent under the last – for the last 30 years or so, of this believing that again we all build a bigger part of the pie and everyone gets their bit of the American dream. 00:04:04

Richard Lamm,

**MAN #5** America is America today because there was no sense of limits. I live in a place where the great doubter said this was the “great American desert.” John Wesley Powell said it would never be developed out there. 00:04:18

So this idea of the limitlessness of American ethic, the see/bee’s, you know the impossible – the difficult we do right away, the impossible takes a little longer. Well I recognize that as an important part of the American tradition, but I very early on became a follower of limits. 00:04:39

I – I believe that – that – that it’s very important for my generation – every generation has its own challenges. I think public policy is like a kaleidoscope and – and time moves that kaleidoscope, and it presents a different pattern. And so I think where the great minds of the last 200 years have been people who’ve pushed aside limits and have been, either through technology or imagination, somehow making a better life through growth, technology and so-called progress, that I think limits can be pushed, but you can’t argue with geometric growth; ultimately geometry trumps. 00:05:23

And so I started looking and started thinking about what’s Colorado going to look like when it’s got 10 million people, 16 million people? And I found that answer just unthinkable. 00:05:37

**FEMALE #1** We have never taken a position on explicit numbers of immigrants, for the simple reason that we’re not talking about numbers of people, we’re talking about our families. 00:05:46

The folks who tend to want to have a debate about numbers are the folks who want to reduce immigration. And they say if we have 700,000 people coming, it should be 500,000. Or if we have 500,000 coming, it should be 200,000. That’s an easy way to have this debate because it sounds reasonable, that maybe we have too many and maybe we should reduce the number. 00:06:04

From where I sit, if you go from 500,000 to 200,000, what you're really saying to me is you can bring your young children but not your adult children. Or you can bring your spouse, but not your mother. And that's asking Americans to have to choose between some family members and others, to have to choose between their right hand and their left hand; which is a choice that we ought not to have to make. 00:06:31

So for Latino's the debate on immigrant numbers is not a debate on numbers, it's about – it's a debate on our family members. And every time the debate on numbers has blossomed into legislation, the legislation has said adult children of U.S. citizens may not come, there is no longer a category for them, or siblings of U.S. citizens can't come any more. 00:06:54

And those are the terms on which we ought to have this debate because we're really asking ourselves how important is family. 00:07:02

**NARRATOR** In Washington, D.C. the battle over immigration reform continues, inside and outside Congress. 00:07:10

While local governments across the country deal with rapidly changing demographics, Ottawa County, Michigan and Holland, its largest city, have been dealing with new realities since the mid 1980's as they wait for Congress to define the meaning of immigration reform. 00:07:28

In particular, the public schools of Holland have been hard hit by a major shift in the city's population base. 00:07:37

**MAN #6** Holland Public Schools is a district of approximately 4,400 students, representing students K through 12 across the city of Holland here. As the district has experienced declining enrollment over the past decade, plus we've been faced with many challenges. 00:07:52

In the past decade we even experienced a population decline of 28% of our student body across the board, so that's forced the district to make many modifications in its programs. An example would be, we used to have 9 elementarys, K/5 neighborhood schools throughout the city, where children were able to walk to school, parents were able to volunteer in a very high basis, very involved in our schools. 00:08:20

Over the past decade we have gone through 2 significant school transformation, where we've had to close 5 elementary buildings over time and reconfigure the district. So that's brought about many challenges to the district to meet some of those economic obligations. 00:08:37

During that same period of time, for the past 30 years we've experienced a change in our demographics in Holland Public Schools as a whole and in the city of Holland. But even more so, in the past decade we've seen a significant change in our demographic makeup as well. 00:08:52

We're a district that's 160 years old, and for the first time 2 years ago the number of minority children collectively as a whole were more than the majority students. As we look at the demographics of Holland Public Schools, we've seen a shift in the families who are moving in to the city, versus the families who are moving out of the city. 00:09:14

And there's a greater proportion of – of families who fit a middle-class Caucasian profile if you will, who seem to be exiting the city for opportunities to develop houses. And then we see a greater influx of individuals who are moving in the city looking for more affordable housing, and they tend to be fitting a profile of a lower socio-economic status as the housing market has decreased, looking at affordable housing. And combined with that, we are experiencing a – a greater number of minority families who are moving in the city. 00:09:51

So one has to ask the question, what's causing one phenomenon to happen or another. But what we do know is true, within that 28% decline of students in Holland Public Schools, many – much of the decline is associated with a Caucasian middle class family leaving the school system. 00:10:10

I know that the changing demographics are going to likely continue here in the city of Holland, which then is Holland Public Schools. Holland Public Schools reflects the city of Holland. And within the – the young children that are being born right now, the number of children being born in poverty, the number of children being born to teen moms, because of the socio-economic status, the number of children who may be born without pre-natal care, that can create additional learning needs of children later on in life. 00:10:42

The number of young families who may not be able to afford preschool or be able to afford adequate child care, that is an additional service that I know that we're going to likely assume as we move forward. 00:10:55

**NARRATOR** For teachers, the educating process have been complicated by a diverse student body. 00:11:02

**MAN #7** I go to all the schools and you know I look at student's last names and during parent/teacher conferences there are e-mail requests being sent around for "I need a translator for *this* language. I need – I need somebody who can speak Arabic. I need somebody who can speak in Spanish. I need someone who can speak Laos or Cambodian or Chinese." 00:11:21

Spanish is the most popular language that is you know being translated for. Language definitely can be a challenge, especially if you have students that are direct immigrants from Mexico or from Jordan or from you know whatever country that they're coming

from; especially if they're being raised by parents who don't speak English well. 00:11:45

You know they're being spoken to in one language at home, and then they're coming to school using – or having to learn English or use English and so they're not getting a solid foundation. I think the school's role as a social service department has become more prevalent and important. 00:12:01

Holland in particular, with our free and reduced lunch rate ranging anywhere from 60 to 80%, I would suspect that that will probably be getting higher as we go on. 00:12:12

When I started teaching, I can remember students coming and being you know lethargic or just kind of not being their peppy self for a 9 or 10-year-old; and you know ask them did you get something for breakfast, did you eat something. And a lot of times the response was "no." 00:12:27

Since then you know we now provide breakfast for those students that qualify, and a - a lot of times they're here before teachers will arrive you know waiting to get into the school, wanting to be with their friends, grab breakfast. We have a – a books and breakfast program where they can get caught up on homework with a tutor or play games with their friends. And so I don't really see as many students now coming to school saying that they weren't able to get breakfast or that they're hungry. 00:12:59

Last year for example, we had you know several in-services throughout the year provided by the local police department on you know the history of gangs. What are the different families and what are some of the common either symbols or what are the – the common colors and the way they communicate, for us to get a little background or history or understanding of what is going on. 00:13:27

Number one it will help us identify possibly future gang members so that we can either identify them and maybe get them on a different track, or if we start to see activity in the school that – that would help the police either with maybe like an on-line – ongoing investigation or maybe something that could potentially you know cause a - a flare up later on. 00:13:52

MAN #8 When I started in this position 3 years ago, it was very evident among the people that I talked to in the community and - and – and every part of our community that the number one concern was what was happening to Hispanic youth in this area. 00:14:09

The dropout rate in our region unofficially approaches about 50%. It's very difficult to get the statistics, but as you look at the raw information, just enrollments and such, it's very, very difficult to reach a – a – a - an otherwise conclusion; that - that about 50% of our youth are not even starting their senior year. 00:14:31

Connect that to the national statistic that says that 16% of Hispanics who complete high school will then go on to complete college. And look at the small sliver of Hispanics who are receiving higher education and becoming equipped to enter into professional positions, and you see where that leaves our youth in an area where there is a high demand for Hispanic professionals. 00:14:56

Yet we're not – we're not giving our youth the tools that they need. And I'm lay - laying no fault at the – at the feet of the high school. The high schools have very – our schools have very dedicated staff; people like Brian Davis of Holland Public Schools, Kent Henson who's principal of West Ottawa Schools, care deeply about these issues. But the Hispanic community must get involved in the solution if we're going to – to make any difference. 00:15:24

MAN #9 There's a high degree of consensus that people who come to American with relatively little education don't make much money, not surprisingly, and often use a fair amount in social services. In the



case of illegals, such as an aside, they often receive their benefits on behalf of their U.S. born children, who under current law are awarded American citizenship automatically. 00:15:47

Immigrants who come to America with lots of education tend to pay a lot more in taxes than they use in services, so it's important to always think about this. However, it's fair to note that about a third of all the foreign born, legal and illegal, in the United States have failed to complete even high school. And individuals with that educational profile are almost always a large fiscal drain on taxpayers. 00:16:15

It's also true that 20 or 30% on top of that have only a high school degree and no additional education. And people with that education level tend to be a significant fiscal drain, though not as large as the high school dropout. 00:16:29

In modern American economy, people with little education don't make much money. Their low incomes mean that, often on behalf of their U.S. children, they're able to receive benefits. And it's important to note that's not cash welfare, that's not what happens. 00:16:48

The kinds of benefits we're talking about are programs like Head Start, free school lunch, Medicaid. Their children can all be enrolled in these programs; the WIC program, the Women, Infants & Children's program. 00:16:59

A large share of these individuals are uninsured and show up in the emergency room, and then that often ends up being borne by taxpayers, the cost of that. 00:17:07

[YOUNG CHILDREN SINGING "THIS LAND IS YOUR LAND"] 00:17:48

END

