



IMMIGRATION PERSPECTIVES ON THE EVE OF THE 2016 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

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The United States has always prided itself as a nation of immigrants. Unfortunately, however, there has been disturbing rhetoric against immigrants and refugees in the current presidential election season. This has been exemplified in racist taunts and epithets against Hamdi Ulukaya, a Turkish immigrant of Kurdish descent, who is the founder of the highly successful Chobani business that makes Greek yogurt and employs about 2,000 people, some of whom are refugees. Chobani's annual yogurt sales are \$1.5 billion. According to a recent [New York Time article](#), false stories have been published by right wing news outlets like Brietbart News and WND claiming that Mr. Ulukaya wants "to drown the United States in Muslims." Some articles have also drawn a connection, again falsely, between Chobani hiring refugees and a spike in tuberculosis. This has led to unfortunate calls on Facebook and Twitter to boycott Chobani.

The Alliance of Business Immigration Lawyers, better known as ABIL, of which I am a member, has in a [press release](#) rightly condemned such xenophobic attacks against a successful immigrant entrepreneur who has created jobs in the United States. It is already difficult for a foreign entrepreneur to obtain legal status in the United States under the current broken immigration system, and to then be successful and create thousands of jobs. Mr. Ulukaya is a shining example of an immigrant entrepreneur who has overcome these obstacles to benefit the United States. "Foreign born entrepreneurs like Mr. Ulukaya must be welcomed rather than attacked in such a shameful and despicable manner," ABIL's President Steve Garfinkel stated. "These attacks go against the grain of what America represents – a nation that has always welcomed those to its shores who wish to better themselves and contribute to the country."

The attacks against Chobani's founder is only one such unfortunate incident. Donald Trump has used hateful rhetoric against immigrants from the start of his campaign. While every prior Republican nominee in recent times has spoken in glowing terms about immigrants being an asset to America, Trump [emphasized only on the dark aspects](#), and hyped up fears of immigrants being a threat to the American people. This is despite the fact that studies have proved that [newcomers are less likely to commit crimes](#) than the native population. Trump was also fond of reading the lyrics from Al Wilson's 1968 R&B hit song "[The Snake](#)" in his campaign rallies. While this is a catchy tune, Trump has now corrupted the song by associating it with his opposition to Muslims. He first called for a ban on Muslims entering the United States, including Syrian refugees, and recently modified it by calling for a suspension of immigration from areas of the world when there is a proven history of terrorism against the United States or its allies. When Trump kicked off his campaign on June 16, 2015, he gave a speech in which he called immigrants from Mexico rapists and criminals. "When Mexico sends it people, they're not sending their best. They're not sending you. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people," he said. He has been proudly proclaiming till the very end that he would build a big wall on the Mexico-US border, and that Mexico would eventually pay for it.

It is no small wonder that there has been a [surge of early Hispanic voters](#) in states like Nevada and Florida that could potentially lead to Trump's defeat. Regardless of one's party affiliation, it is hoped that the results of this election affirm that all immigrants be respected for the benefits they bring to the United States, whether as entrepreneurs or as hard working employees. The results should also speed up much needed and urgent reform of the immigration system that can tap into the talents of more immigrants like Mr. Ulukaya who bring growth and prosperity to America. Finally, the [recent revelation that Melania Trump was paid for modeling assignments in the United States while she was still on the B visa](#), and prior to obtaining the H-1B visa, goes to show that the line between legal and illegal immigrants is fuzzy at best. Someone in legal status can fall out of status and someone who is illegal can suddenly become legal. This is not a black and white issue as Trump and his anti-immigrant enablers have seen it. The following extract from the Supreme

Court's decision in *Plyler v. Doe*, 457 US 202 (1982), which held that undocumented children could not be deprived of a public education:

To be sure, like all persons who have entered the United States unlawfully, these children are subject to deportation. But there is no assurance that a child subject to deportation will ever be deported. An illegal entrant might be granted federal permission to continue to reside in the country, or even become a citizen.

The lessons from these elections should point lawmakers to recognize that putting up a wall is not a solution; rather the best way to reduce illegal immigration, and reforming the system as a whole, is by providing more pathways to legal immigration into the United States. It would also be a good idea for any future presidential candidate to express compassion towards immigrants and refugees, consistent with America being great because of its immigrants, rather than engage in hateful rhetoric. It does not pay during election time.