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Opinions

# Laura Ingraham: Why conservatives should say no to immigration reform



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By **Laura Ingraham** February 19

*Laura Ingraham is the host of “The Laura Ingraham Show” and a regular Fox News contributor.*

Recently on Fox News Sunday, [my friend George Will and I had a vivid disagreement](#) about whether conservatives should support the immigration “reform” measures being pushed by the president and the GOP leadership on Capitol Hill. [Last week, Will devoted a column to the issue](#), claiming that those of us who oppose the president “reflect waning confidence” in American culture and the U.S. economy. He then tried to refute the major arguments made by the conservative opponents of reform. The result was depressing evidence that not even someone as smart as Will can make a persuasive defense of immigration reform.

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Let's start with the claim that opponents of reform have "waning confidence" in our culture and economy. In the first place, anyone who has as much confidence in this country as he did a decade ago hasn't been paying attention. In his own column, Will concedes that George W. Bush was the first president since Woodrow Wilson to serve two terms and [leave office with the average household income lower](#) than when he entered it, and Obama may be the second. To me, these are not signs that the folks in Washington know what they are doing. Hope and optimism are beautiful things — when appropriate. But hope is not the basis for policy. Wise policymakers analyze major issues such as immigration carefully and look at facts and probabilities, instead of just hoping for the best. And when you look at Will's arguments for immigration reform, you'll see that the wise move for conservatives is to keep doing what they've been doing: Just say no.

- Will claims that the GOP should not focus its arguments in 2014 solely on Obamacare. I agree, and so do other conservative opponents of immigration reform. But that hardly proves that we will benefit politically from giving in to the president on his top priority and yielding a huge political victory to the Democrats that will boost their morale and devastate many people in our base.

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- Will maintains that if the GOP enforces unanimity on

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major issues, it will not grow. GOP supporters of reform are not being silenced or pushed out of the party. And, again, I don't see the political benefits of siding with the president and House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) against the conservative base on such a vital issue. The easiest way for the GOP to do very poorly in 2014 would be for its base to stay home, and that is more likely to happen if conservative voters watch the GOP cooperate with the president on immigration.

- Will contends that it is “unworthy” of conservatives to conclude that immigrant voters will always vote for Democrats. This is a plea for hope over experience. Of course conservatives should be trying to get immigrants' votes. Of course they should never give up on any voting bloc. But poll after poll has shown that Hispanic voters (many of whom are immigrants) overwhelmingly support the Democratic Party — not just because of immigration, but also because they generally agree with Democrats on fundamental questions of how much the national government can and should do. In light of these data and the experience of California — which has shifted from a Republican stronghold to one of the most liberal states in the country, in large part because of the rise of its immigrant population — it is absurd to pretend that allowing even more immigrant voters wouldn't be a boon to the Democrats.

- He also contends there is no “data” showing that U.S. culture has lost its power to assimilate immigrants. But today [20.8 percent of Americans don't speak English at home — up from 17.9 percent in 2000](#). In a [2011 Pew Research Center survey](#), Hispanic voters (again, many of

whom are immigrants) were more hostile to the word capitalism than almost all other groups surveyed — including self-identified liberal Democrats. [The Hudson Institute reported last year](#) that “[b]y 21 percentage points (65% to 44%), native-born citizens are more likely than naturalized immigrants to view America as ‘better’ than other countries as opposed, to ‘no better, no worse.’” In fact, on 20 separate issues, it found a large gap on matters of patriotism and civic understanding between native-born Americans and citizen immigrants. Among immigrants today, it is increasingly fashionable to reject American exceptionalism in favor of multiculturalism. To pretend that this isn’t happening isn’t optimism; it’s sheer fantasy.

- Will claims that conservative opponents of “reform” support the “East Germanization” of our border. This is an outrageous assertion — East Germany tried to keep its people from escaping a vile dictatorship. By contrast, conservatives simply want the U.S. government to fulfill a top priority of any government — defending our borders to ensure that the benefits of American life belong only to those people who are here legally. That’s not happening now. Will relies on a blog post from Brad Plumer of The Post to claim that our southwestern border security is [84 percent “effective.”](#) But that post also noted that in 2011, 85,000 people successfully crossed our Southwest border illegally — and that non-government sources think the number is much higher. And Plumer also has reported that “the best outside estimate” is that the [U.S. government only stops about half of all illegal border crossings from Mexico](#). Conservatives are wise to insist on much stricter enforcement measures.

●Will insists that simply because President Obama can't be trusted to enforce reforms is no reason not to pass laws that "subsequent presidents will respect." But I don't see reason to believe that a President Hillary Clinton or President Jeb Bush would be more eager to enforce our immigration laws. And in any event, if we're supposed to count on the next president to enforce immigration reform, wouldn't it make sense to wait to see who the next president is?

●Will cites a recent [Congressional Budget Office report](#) that indicates that immigration will be good for the U.S. economy. But the CBO report states that if the Senate's "Gang of Eight" bill becomes law, U.S. per-capita gross national product would be 0.7 percent lower in 2023 than if the law were not passed. That hardly sounds like a recipe for a healthier economy.

●Will concludes that House Republicans are opposed to immigration reform because they have "only dim memories of a more dynamic United States." Nonsense. Does he really believe that most House Republicans can't remember the Reagan economy or the 1990s dot-com boom? House Republicans probably are the only ones who remember that the policy of letting millions of immigrants into the country — by not adequately enforcing our borders — has already been tried and has failed. Time after time, we are told that there are 11 million illegal immigrants already here. Where's the resulting economic boom? Why do we believe that opening the borders even more — and letting even more people pour into this market — would have a different result?

● Finally, Will says that “[z]ero-sum reasoning about a fixed quantity of American opportunity is for a United States in a defensive crouch.” Given how badly this country has been governed in recent years, it makes sense for conservatives to be more aggressive about defending us from bad ideas percolating in Washington. More important, Will has misstated the role of optimism in policymaking. The wise policymaker doesn’t assume that any policy adopted in good faith will have good results. Instead, he or she weighs the likely outcome of any new policy based on facts and experience — not sentiments and dreams. In this case, the overwhelming evidence suggests that passing immigration reform will be a political boon for liberals, weaken our national sovereignty and lower our per-capita GNP. Furthermore, recent history shows that leaders in both parties are fanatics on the topic of immigration, and they cannot be trusted to effectively enforce any significant border measure. Under these circumstances, for conservatives to sit down with President Obama and his political allies to write a bill that will reward the president would not be an act of political courage; it would be political suicide.

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George Will is a brilliant writer and thinker-and a close friend. If anyone could put forward a conservative defense of immigration “reform,” it would be Will. But even the best advocate can’t do much with a hopeless case. We should continue insisting that the laws be enforced as

written.

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