



Mark Belling

Belling Feedback

Rolling back the welcome mat

One family targeted while thousands are assisted

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Thousands of illegal immigrants live in Milwaukee and Waukesha. Everybody knows they're here - including the government - and no one does a thing about it. We even give them Wisconsin driver's licenses. Wisconsin last year even started a program to create government-subsidized mortgages for illegal aliens. Literally everyone looks the other way. For some reason, our government has decided to look at Regina Bakala.

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Bakala, 43, of Hales Corners, is being deported to the Congo, the African nation she and her husband fled from a decade after being tortured for fighting for democracy. Bakala and her husband, David, both have jobs and their two children, both 100 percent legal American citizens, attend school at St. Mary's in Hales Corners, the church and school where Bakala is employed.

Living the American dream, the Bakalas recently applied for a mortgage as they sought to buy their first house. The bank asked for Bakala's work permit. That triggered a red tape orgy down at bureaucratville in Milwaukee. Bakala doesn't have a work permit because her 1997 bid for asylum in the United States was turned down years later. Without a work permit, she is being told she must leave the country. Ponder the irony of that - a woman who is WORKING is being denied a work permit.

The Bakalas are exactly the kind of people upon whom our nation has been built. They came to the United States looking for freedom. Both parents work. They've started a family. They go to church. Their kids are in school. It is an unusually sadistic government that would rip their lives from them and send them back to a strife-ridden African nation that ostracizes Christians and denies basic rights, like voting.

It would be one thing if our government was zealously enforcing immigration laws. Instead, the U.S.-Mexican border has been made a red carpet. Some estimates say 7 percent of the California and Arizona populations are made up of illegals. Even as far north as Wisconsin, illegal immigrants provide a cheap labor market for employers. Children born to these immigrants attend public schools. Their names are all over government documents and records. Nary a stir from the bureaucracy.

When David and Regina Bakala, however, decided to try to buy a house this long-slumbering immigration bureaucracy acted as though al-Qaida was seeking to set up corporate headquarters. This isn't mere lack of prioritization. It is absence of common sense. It is insane.

By deporting Regina Bakala, our government is also deporting her family. Both of her children were born in the United States and are thus American citizens. Unless the feds are advocating child abandonment, these children must leave their country - their own homeland - in order to stay with their mom. No American deserves this kind of treatment, particularly the children of the Bakalas.

Am I suggesting the government look the other way at Regina Bakala? Well, yeah. Just like we've looked the other way at the other 10 million illegal immigrants in this country. Just as we give student visas to every rich European and Arab kid who wants to attend an American college. Or every terrorist who enrolls in flight school. And just as we create programs to encourage other illegals to apply for government-subsidized mortgages. Our immigration laws, just like our speeding laws, are rarely enforced. Just as speeding tickets are reserved for the most blatant speeders, deportation should be used for those causing problems in America, not those making our country better.

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By the way, what kind of decision-making leads to denial of asylum for a Christian woman from a Muslim nation beset with virtual civil war, tribal killings and systematic torture for government opponents? If Regina Bakala is exiled back to the Congo, she will likely be killed for her earlier pro-democracy activism. If she is not worthy of asylum, who is?

The most bizarre aspect to this case is that the key to legal immigration in the United States is supposed to be the obtaining of a work permit. Regina Bakala has a job. She works. Give her a work permit for crying out loud. Instead, the government allows tens of thousands of legal immigrants to enter the country and immediately hop on the welfare gravy train. Churches that sponsored huge numbers of Hmong refugees have been praised for assisting these folks in getting American welfare benefits. The Bakalas don't want handouts. They want to buy a house with their own money.

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Immigration is a tough issue. On the one hand, we have allowed our nation's overtaxed resources to be bled mercilessly by subsidizing millions of illegal immigrants. On the other hand, our economy has greatly benefited from immigrant workers willing to take jobs that many Americans refuse. In the meantime, American citizens are created every time an immigrant has a baby. We can't kick them all out and we seem incapable of stopping them from coming in. Blatant illegality can't be tolerated. But somehow a government that employs human beings with brains to make judgment calls and decisions must find a way to allow a hard-working Christian family who found a better life in America to stay here.

(Mark Belling is the host of a daily WISN radio talk show and a Sunday television show. His column runs Wednesdays in The Freeman.)
