

### Conversations with Bill Kristol

Guest: Linda Chavez,  
Senior Fellow, National Immigration Forum

*Taped Nov 3, 2021*

#### Table of Contents

**I: The Border and the Biden Administration (00:15 - 31:46)**

**II: The Need for Immigration Reform (31:46 - 1:12:20)**

**I: The Border and the Biden Administration (00:15 - 31:46)**

KRISTOL: Hi, I'm Bill Kristol. Welcome to CONVERSATIONS. I'm very pleased to be joined today by my friend and colleague, and recent conversationalist Linda Chavez. We had a good conversation, very good I think honestly, on immigration three years ago. And I think you laid out the issue in a way that's extremely useful for people. And I recommend that they go back and watch it, or listen to it, or read the transcript. But I thought we should update, to say the least, our conversation today on immigration.

Linda has had many positions in government, and think tanks, and knows this issue particularly well, though she is generally a wise commentator on public affairs. Linda is Senior Fellow with the National Immigration Forum, and a colleague of mine at Defending Democracy Together. Linda, thanks for joining me today.

CHAVEZ: It's great to be with you.

KRISTOL: So, immigration, when we discussed it three years ago it was a hot topic. Donald Trump, he'd run on it, he was governing on it in certain ways. The Democrats and others were fighting back. And then, what's happened? I mean, it's been a year since Joe Biden — almost exactly a year, right? — won the presidency. And the issue, I won't say it's disappeared exactly. But it's, I don't know. It's sort of odd what's happened, it seems to me, in terms of policy and politics. Anyway, tell us, where are we on immigration?

CHAVEZ: It is. It is very odd. the only time we seem to be focused on it is when we have thousands, even tens of thousands, of people at our southern border trying to get in. But on the day-to-day, once we clear the people from under the bridge — the Haitians were the most recent group that tried to come in back in September — and once we deal with that immediate problem, we go back to ignoring it. And that means that nothing changes, nothing gets better. And we don't deal with the underlying problems, which is we need to restructure our immigration laws.

And I think politicians, on both the left and the right, wish this issue would just go away. The right, I think many people on the right know that we do need immigration reform. We do need to change our legal immigration laws, but they can't possibly say that in the GOP of Donald Trump. And on the left, I think they realize that the American people are not for open borders. They're not for just letting anybody who

shows up come in willy-nilly into the country. And so they also have to be wary, because if they say that they will irritate the progressive left. So we are in a stalemate, and it's not good for the country.

KRISTOL: Yeah, I want to get to the border, which has been the one thing that's been most visible, and I think the most politically salient aspect, and maybe has paralyzed action on other aspects of immigration, but just on the substance for a minute.

You made the case three years ago that we need immigration. We need probably more immigration. We need high-skilled and lower-skilled immigration. Obviously the system needs to be reformed in all kinds of ways, because it is very — anyone who deals with how cumbersome and arbitrary it can be. But it is kind of amazing, isn't it? We've had two years of COVID and therefore, almost partly just because COVID and partly because of Trump changes and regulations and so forth, Trump administration changes, we've had very little immigration I believe.

And everyone says, "Oh there's this is terrible labor shortage," especially for some low skilled entry-level jobs, which immigrants have been taking disproportionately. But no one even says — And then we also want to do much more in tech and so forth where there's some high skilled opportunities for immigrants. And it's amazing to me that the Biden administration and Congress, whether on a Democratic basis or a bipartisan basis has done just nothing. Maybe they've done stuff beneath the surface that I don't see beneath the surface, I don't know. Isn't that —

CHAVEZ: That's exactly right. And part of the problem is that they have the experience of the George W. Bush administration and you know this experience well. George W. Bush did try a major overhaul of our immigration laws back in the mid 2000s and it didn't work. He was derailed by Rush Limbaugh and the whole group of talk show hosts who really riled up the masses and created the populous mob that helped create Donald Trump.

So I think that's part of the problem. But look, we do have a big problem at the border. Last year, in fiscal year 2021, 1.7 million people were apprehended trying to come into the United States. Now the ordinary listener hears that and thinks, "Oh my goodness, we've got millions of people coming in." And adding to what they may think are tens of millions of illegal immigrants already here. That's not true.

The 1.7 million are people who are apprehended. And of those ones that 1.7 million, about a quarter of them have made multiple attempts. And in fact, about a quarter of them had tried to come in the previous months. So it's not like these are all new people. More than half of them are immediately turned back. They don't step foot really into the United States.

If they are in family groups, if they're unaccompanied minors, and if they're claiming asylum, there are conditions in which we do bring people in. We put them in detention and we try to deal with their applications. However, during the Trump era, and because of the pandemic, the Trump administration invoked something called Title 42, which is an old law which says that you can close the borders if there is a threat to public health. And obviously COVID is a threat to public health.

And obviously during the height of the COVID crisis, before we had vaccines, before we had adequate treatment, you couldn't let a bunch of people come across the border and come into the United States even on a temporary basis. And so the Trump administration said, "No, you can come and show up and want to claim asylum, but you're going to have to wait in Mexico." Well Biden and progressives in general thought this was cruel and inhumane because in fact you had tens of thousands of people just on the other side of the border, many of them in these makeshift camps, unsanitary conditions, no health available, no healthcare available. And so President Biden tried to change that. He basically said, "No, we're going to go back to the old way of doing business. We're going to take asylum seekers as they come." However, the Administration was sued by the state of Texas and Title 42 as a result is now back in place because of an order by a district judge.

So we're back to square one. We have lots of people who can't come in, some of whom have legitimate claims for asylum. And we don't have any fix whatsoever to the major problem, which is bringing in

people, as you say, who are willing to work here and who are going to do jobs that are not taking away jobs from Americans, but doing jobs that Americans are, number one, too educated by and large to do. The average American has more than a high school education. I don't assume you or I or most Americans look at their children in school and say, "Honey, I want you to grow up and be a janitor. I want you to be cleaning office buildings at night." They have better dreams and opportunities. But for people who have no work opportunities in their home country, those jobs are a stepping stone. They're the bottom rungs of the economic ladder. And so we do have people who are willing to do those jobs and we have yet to find a way how to bring those people in.

KRISTOL: Yeah, it is kind of striking, and the Administration seems, I don't know, maybe they're more paralyzed than they need to be because of the problems at the border. But let's just stay on the border for a minute because that's been all the news. So looking at it, how much of a problem do we have of illegals coming across the border? How much of a problem do we have of chaos at the border? Is it what we've experienced for 30 years and we shouldn't get too alarmed about it and just go about our business and fix the rest of the immigration system and assume the border's going to be messy for the next while? What's the right balance on that.

CHAVEZ: It's really what we have experienced for 50 years or more. The question of particularly people from Mexico and Central America who see this country as a land of opportunity. They want to come here, they want to make their lives here. Some of them don't want to stay here. They just come and work, maybe put in a few years working, send money back home to their families, and then go back home. There's no way for people who want to do that on any large scale to do it. We do have some temporary visas, seasonal visas, but morass, the red tape that you have to go through, that employers have to go through to get those kinds of seasonal works makes that impossible.

But in terms of the historical picture and where are we now, as I said, the 1.7 million apprehensions is the biggest number ever recorded. I don't know if you looked at it in terms of the rate, and our population is obviously much bigger than it was 50 years ago, but it's a big number. The number of people who are unauthorized and living in the United States, however, has been holding steady for years. It reached its peak almost 20 years ago, between 2000 and 2005 was the largest number of people living unauthorized in the United States. We had over 12 and a half million people then. We're at about 10 and a half million people now, so the number is not historically great. And certainly as when you compare it to our population, it's not a huge number, but it is a problem.

And the chaos that you sometimes see happens when word spreads in a community, as it did in the Haitian community after the storms hit the island, after the political violence there, that America would offer refuge, that they would offer asylum to Haitians. And so you had literally over 10,000 people showing up in one little town on the border with Mexico, and they ended up camping under a bridge. The scenes were terrible. The enforcement efforts looked very bad, although some of the original claims that people were being attacked by men on horses and whipped turned out probably not to be true, although we haven't gotten the full picture yet, there's an investigation going on.

But nonetheless, people were rounded up, they were put into buses, some of them not even knowing where they were going and they were sent off to airports and sent back many of them to Haiti. Now these are people in large part who hadn't lived in Haiti in a decade or more. These are people who had left Haiti years ago had made lives in mostly South America and those lives weren't going well. And so that's why they left and came here.

But those kinds of scenes I think make people feel that we are under siege and that there are these hordes of people who are going to rush our borders. And I think that's an incorrect view. And I think the way in which the Administration handled it was not particularly deft. They weren't well equipped and they didn't seem to know it was going to be happening, which if you follow these issues, all you had to see was the storm hit Haiti to know that we were going to have a rush. Haitians, unfortunately since 1980, Haitians have tried to claim asylum and refuge in the United States and I believe have been treated unfairly. They have been treated differently, for example, than Cubans who have sought refuge here.

So it shouldn't have been a surprise to the administration. I don't think they handled it well, but at least for now that has calmed down. Although we do have reports that there are more Haitian migrants on the move up from Latin America, from South America up through Panama and through central America and who knows when or if they will merge.

KRISTOL: But we have a lot of Haitian immigrants in the United States actually. And we have data presumably on how they're doing and my vague impression is they may not be doing super terrific, but they're doing okay. And it's not like crime surges or something if 10,000 Haitians should show up.

CHAVEZ: They almost all have high school educations. 20% of them have college degrees. They don't earn quite at the median level of American families, but it isn't all that much below. It's about 10% below the median, and they're doing well. If you compare Haitian immigrants, for example, to the native born black population, Haitians do better than native born blacks in a lot of measures.

So I don't think we should be so worried that somehow if we let these people in that they're going to become permanent burdens. That's always the fear of people who are worried about immigration is that somehow these people aren't ever going to become Americans. Well with Haitians, they have the highest rate of all of the major refugee groups of naturalization and becoming U.S. citizens. So they do become Americans. They have higher than average English speaking rates, even though they come from a country where English is not the native language.

So they do, they do do reasonably well. So do most all of the other groups. It is really rare to find a group, even a group of the people who've come here illegally, who are not striving to make a better life and aren't in fact making progress toward doing that. They are not coming here to be on welfare. They're not eligible for welfare. They are not coming here to steal jobs. They're coming here to take jobs where there's help wanted signs out and nobody else is showing up to take them. And I think that the not only most humane thing to do, but the best thing for America to do is figure out a way where we can bring these people in, in an orderly fashion, have a flow that is going to help our country, help our country grow, contribute to our economy, and solve the problem that way. But unfortunately, nobody in Congress is listening.

KRISTOL: I mean what you just said sounds like what an intelligent Biden advisor would've said frankly a year ago and what we're going to do differently from Trump. And what happened? They just got paralyzed by the border situation? Or Congress turns out to be unreceptive even to the most common sense, you'd think, reforms that pretty manifestly aren't going to deprive Americans of jobs and so forth and that would just rationalize a current system where there are, as you say, there are these provisions in law for temporary workers, I guess, seasonal workers, other provisions in law for green card holders. And all of it seems to just not work at this point because the system is so broken.

CHAVEZ: We have a backlog in terms of people applying for green cards of 5 million people. So those are people who are eligible for green cards, who are in the system, who put in their paperwork. They can't get a green card. And what happens is those green cards essentially expire annually. So if we have X number, let's say 750,000 green cards available in a year, but because of the backlog, and obviously the pandemic made that worse, we only distribute 500,000 of them. Those 250,000 are lost. And one of the provisions now being talked about on the Hill is a way to essentially recapture those green cards that were authorized but not never used. That would go a long way to helping get rid of the backlog. But there is —

KRISTOL: These are people who want to come legally, obviously that's why they applied for green cards.

CHAVEZ: And they're eligible, they're eligible. They have first order relatives here or they have —

KRISTOL: I see, so they've already passed the first hurdle in a sense.

CHAVEZ: Right, they passed the test, they just can't get themselves in.

KRISTOL: And if they come in, they could get jobs because they would have green cards. But are they eligible even for welfare? I don't know that they are even.

CHAVEZ: No, well it depends on how you define welfare. No, they're not eligible to get a check from the government for living expenses. Their children may be eligible for certain kinds of SNAP and some of the food programs.

And by the way, that's become a big battleground as well because the Trump administration decided that any immigrant who took advantage legally of what was available to him or her would be prevented from ever becoming a US citizen. They would be considered a public charge, and therefore, if you were a family, let's say you were a Mexican family with a couple of kids and both mom and dad are working jobs, but they still can't quite make it and so they get a little bit of assistance from SNAP from the food stamp program, the Trump administration said, "Sorry, you'll never be a US citizen because you're a public charge." Well, the Biden administration has tried to undo that. But again, this is being battled in the courts and how it will ultimately turn out is anybody's guess.

KRISTOL: So yeah, so let's talk about the Biden administration for a minute and then get to Congress maybe. It just feels to me, but I don't follow this issue very closely, that there's been a certain lack of focus and — competence is probably too strong a criticism — but serious, I'm sure they're serious, but successful attempts at least to prioritize certain things to say, "Okay, we'll bracket the question of what to do about X, Y, or Z later and the border stuff and we made some mistakes and we're working on that. But meanwhile, we have X million DACA recipients here," who everyone agrees it's crazy for them not to have a path to citizenship and to be reassured that they're not going to be expelled. And we have X number of green card applicants who want to be here legally and businesses and everyone tells us we need to have some of them here to work.

And so there are, seems to be, that could make three or four arguments that are pretty common sense and at one point might not have been terribly controversial even in terms of politics and partisanship. And I guess you can say A, now are they controversial in Congress? But B, I don't even hear the Biden administration making those arguments. I guess that's what strikes me. I would've expected — I might not expect that Biden succeed, God knows that Congress is evenly divided, they're not succeeding on election reform and a million other things, but you do hear them at least make the argument for why we need to fix the electorate system. I don't even hear the arguments on immigration, but maybe I'm not paying enough attention. I don't know.

CHAVEZ: No, you're not hearing them because they're not being made. Part of the problem is, and I think this sounds very parochial but it's true, it's a guy from Delaware. What does he know about immigrants? What does he know about the constant change that has taken place over the Southwest or even the South, the American South now is the base of many immigrants who've come to work in agriculture. So I think there's a little bit of tone deafness on his part. I don't think this is something that hits him viscerally. For George W. Bush, it was intimate. He understood this. He was a governor of a border state. For Ronald Reagan, it was intimate. He was the governor of California. Anybody from the Southwest understands the immigration issue in an intuitive way, in a way that a politician from a state like Delaware probably does not.

But there's also the case of what priorities you have coming in. I remember back in 2009, when President Obama came in, there was great hope that President Obama was going to do something on immigration. But he wanted to get healthcare passed and he knew that if he was going to get healthcare passed, he had to devote all of his attention, he had to expend all of his political capital to get that done.

Well now you have Biden, and he has these grand schemes for social change, the new Great Society that he's trying to create and so immigration just isn't up there. And I look at the bill, the big human infrastructure bill that President Biden has introduced. And I think one of the best ways you can improve human infrastructure is to bring in more human capital, and too bad he didn't think of it in those terms, too bad he didn't really integrate it in that way.

Now some of the pro-immigration forces over on the Hill have been trying to convince the parliamentarian that indeed we can put some sort of immigration fix in the reconciliation bill so that we only need 51 votes in the Senate, including the vice president. That hasn't gone over. The parliamentarian said no, there are a lot of advocates who are saying, "Ignore the parliamentarian, do it anyway." But your bet is as good as mine, but my guess is that even if they were successful in doing it, again, it would end up back in the courts and I'm not sure we'd solve anything.

It really takes somebody with an understanding of the issue, of vision, and the willingness to go to the American people and make the case. It is a case that can be made. I spent years going out around the country speaking to Republican groups, speaking to conservatives, going into rooms where people thought initially that I was crazy, but the more I spoke, the more I explained how messed up our immigration system was and how much better it would be to fix it, the more people came over and said, "Well I'm not against immigrants. I'm only against illegal immigration."

But it takes the willingness to do that. And he hasn't been willing to do it. Kamala Harris, who is from a border state, she was given that as part of her charge, she hasn't done much of anything. And we just haven't seen the kind of national leadership to put this on the table and to make this a national discussion.

KRISTOL: What strikes me is I think if you asked a lot of economists, okay, there are all these things Biden wants to do and he wants the economy to get going as we all do after COVID, but also in a stable way that's not too inflationary. A lot of them would say, "Just having a normal flow of immigration again." And I want to come back to this and ask you what the real flow is today, but a normal flow of legal, and if necessary, to be honest, undocumented immigrants as well, is one of the best things you could do for non-inflationary economic growth and not taking jobs away from Americans and so forth.

And so you're ignoring this whole — leaving aside even the fancier arguments about human capital and second generation, which I also think are important — but you're taking one of the most obvious things you can do and then you're claiming that, "Well these other things are going to help or not," and they may help. I'm not even taking a position on that. Just, it is kind of odd to just exclude this whole thing. I guess it's not odd because it's so politically controversial, but the other stuff's politically controversial too.

And it just occurred to me as we were talking, about you know Biden has these Great Society-like ambitions, in 1965 and the equivalent of Medicare and all that. One thing that happened, wasn't it '65, was it '64? — is there was a huge liberalization of immigration. Why doesn't he look at that thing that Lyndon Johnson and the Democratic Congress did? In addition to all the other things they did?

CHAVEZ: Well that's right. Now if you're an immigration restrictionist, you at that 1965 immigration reform, and you say, "Oh that's why we got all of our problems."

KRISTOL: Yeah, but Biden doesn't believe that and I don't think the evidence bears it out. Anyway, that's a fight he should be willing to have, to really think —

CHAVEZ: Yeah, and you're right. I haven't seen the very latest figures for fiscal year '21 and how many green cards we gave out, but I know that we did not give out the full complement of green cards. And as I say that, just adds to that backlog. And part of it is bureaucratic. Part of it is the fact you don't have people sitting in their offices processing the paperwork.

And by the way, even some of the work itself is difficult. If you've got documents that you need to get from your birth country and your birth country happens to be a country that's been devastated by COVID and in which everything has ground to halt, you're not going to be able to come up with that. So yeah, part of it is that, part of it is that there's just been a slowing down of the normal process.

But it also I think is almost planned. This is what Trump did. He lowered the numbers. He ended up not giving out the number of work visas that were available. It used to be that there are special H1-B programs where employers get certain kinds of workers. And once they would announce the number for

that year, within two or three days, they'd all be gone because the employers were there and ready. Well Trump actually slowed that process down. So we didn't even bring in the people that were authorized.

On the refugee front, this was an area, we've mostly been talking about immigration. Refugees are different than immigrants, but in the refugee program, Trump just shut it down. He just essentially wasn't letting in any refugees and people had great hopes when president Biden came in that in the first year, that we would go from basically none, fewer than 10,000, we'd see a big jump.

In fact, that didn't happen. The number for fiscal year 2021 was kept at 12,500. That is a 10th of the historic figure. I mean, in times when you've had huge refugee problems around the world, the United States has always been the most generous country. We've always taken in 100,000, 125,000 a year, and they've done well. I mean, look at our Vietnamese community. Look at Russian Jews. Russian Jews were huge beneficiaries in 1980 of the Refugee Act. They've all done very, very well. But that program was literally, it was more than decimated, there was only 10% of the number that was available, that normally would be available, that were given out.

Now this next year, 2022, we are going to see more. Even at the end of last year, because of the Afghan situation, the number eventually was raised. I think it was raised to 65,000. But again, that's still half of what it had traditionally been, particularly when you look at these refugee crisis around the world. As I say, we have more people on the move who've been displaced, because of war than we have in any period since World War II.

KRISTOL: Just on the Afghan situation, that will be tens of thousands at least of refugees. Do you feel like we are at least doing an adequate job of getting them, helping them get resettled and started and so forth?

CHAVEZ: It's a little early to know. I will tell you, because I have personal experience with the Vietnamese experience. I took a couple of brothers into my home and did it through a local Catholic church and brought them in, picked them up at Dulles Airport. This was the middle of winter, I can remember they had on flip flops on their feet, even though there was snow outside, they had no winter jacket, they were wearing short sleeve shirts. We brought them in, we took them to Walmart, got them clothed. One of them just retired from the FBI recently. He was a computer person at the FBI. So, they did very well.

But it wasn't difficult for me to do that. There was a mechanism. I've said that I'm happy to take an Afghan family in now. I happen to have a farmhouse in rural Virginia that we use on the weekend and could house a whole family, but there doesn't seem to be any mechanism. It isn't as if there's a big network out there helping integrate these people.

So I think the jury is still out. I'm glad we brought these people here and I'm hoping that it's going to work as well as previous resettlements have. But the whole infrastructure of the refugee resettlement community was undone during the Trump years. Most of the resettlement is not done directly by the government, but is done by organizations, US Catholic Services, the Hebrew Immigration [Aid Society] HIAS, different — Lutheran Refugee Program. Because it was so severely cut back during the Trump years, they lost their funding. They lost people, they're trying to hire as well. So it's going to be, I think, a more difficult process when we necessarily should have had, because of what was done during the Trump years.

KRISTOL: I guess vetting Afghans is a little more complicated than vetting Vietnamese in 1976 or something.

CHAVEZ: Absolutely. Absolutely. I mean, the Vietnamese people look now and say, "Oh, well, they did very well. Their kids are all going to Harvard. They're doing great." Well, talk to the farmers and fishermen in Texas, down in the Corpus Christi area, when the Vietnamese fishermen started coming in. They weren't real happy. They were not welcomed with open arms. So there was conflict there too.

As with the two young men that I took in, they were literate, but barely, and had very little formal schooling. So, we always look back on the immigrant groups, the refugee groups, and we always romanticize them, "But they were different. They were ambitious and they were committed to being Americans." Well, it's always — is it a little bit of a romantic view. It was harder even in the early 20th Century than any of us want to admit.

## **II: The Need for Immigration Reform (31:46 - 1:12:20)**

KRISTOL: Say a word about DACA and the quote, Dreamers. I mean, that just seems like something that was teed up and then Trump, of course, there were fights about it between the Trump years. But I think if one left the US in November a year ago and came back a year from now and someone said, "Well, what's the status of those Dreamers? Are they finally on some reasonable path?" I think he, or she would be a little surprised to find out that the answer is, if I'm not mistaken, that nothing has changed. Right?

CHAVEZ: No, in fact, it's worse than nothing has changed. I mean, what has ended up happening is you have about 700,000 DACA recipients who are in the program, they've gone through the paperwork, they're eligible and they've been accepted into the program and they have authorization to work, or to go to school under the program. The problem is, again —

KRISTOL: These are people mostly who were brought to the US as children.

CHAVEZ: They had to have been brought as children. They had to either have graduated from high school, be in school, in college, be in the military or have a job. So you couldn't have people who were again, going to be public wards participating. And the paperwork was voluminous. I mean, you had to come up with years of records, of bank accounts and where you'd lived. It was a very strong vetting process. Okay. So there's 700,000 of them.

Well, there was a court case that challenged DACA, it went up to the Supreme Court, the Supreme Court put it back down at the District Court level, and just a few months ago, the District Court judge in that case said, "All right, it's an illegal program. It's unconstitutional. President Obama did not have the authority to do what he did. He violated the Administrative Act." Which requires that if you're going to make changes using a regulatory process, you have to go through the formal process of issuing regulations, putting them out for public comment and going through the bureaucratic rigmarole that you have to do when you want to change laws or change regulations in the United States. Of course, Obama didn't do that.

He had his Secretary of Homeland Defense simply issue a Memorandum of Understanding that outlined the DACA program and outlined some other procedures for the parents of DACA children and for Temporary Protected Status people, who are here, they have legal status here, because we've given it to them, but it's protected.

So anyway, so the judge in Texas basically said, "No go. You've got to come up with legal regulations." That is exactly what the Biden Administration is in the process of doing now. They have gone back to the playing field and they've written up regulations. They have got them out there for comment, and we'll see. We'll see what happens.

KRISTOL: But this is really for Congress. I mean, ultimately, this is fixable by passing a law.

CHAVEZ: Yeah. And by the way —

KRISTOL: Aren't there millions of them? You mentioned several hundred thousand, I guess —

CHAVEZ: — that are actually in the program. Yeah. I think about a million and a half of them, at least, who would be eligible, but these are the 700,000 who actually have the protected status of DACA.



But, I think again, most people would be surprised to hear that the whole concept of DACA was a Republican idea. Senator Orrin Hatch, Lindsey Graham, they came up with this idea. We shouldn't punish children for the sins of the father. We want to give them a pathway to becoming American. Many of these kids, they don't speak the language of their parents' country. They don't identify as anything other than American. We have paid good money, good taxpayer money to educate these kids and yet, unless we give them some legal status on a permanent basis and give them a pathway to become citizens, they could end up finding themselves back on the streets of Guadalajara, or San Pedro Sula, or any of the other countries where their parents came from, the cities their parents came from.

So this is really a tragedy. We're talking about the most high achieving of the group of immigrants. I mean, these are kids who have graduated high school, they are earning a living. Many of them are in college. I mean, there are doctors, there are nurses, there are scientists, people who have done extraordinarily well, even though they grew up poor and under adverse circumstances, they really are living the American dream and to essentially get rid of them, to take them out. I mean, it would be a huge hit to the economy and it would be just, I think, brutal and inhumane.

KRISTOL: But just leaving them in limbo, also curbs their ability to do certain things and —

CHAVEZ: Right.

KRISTOL: — make plans, of course, and live their lives. No, it's really, I find that part astonishing. Then aren't there other, especially when you hear the figure about three million, five million, those are not DACA recipients, but those are other people for whom there, they would've been legalized, so to speak, under various proposals?

CHAVEZ: Yeah. There are a whole bunch of different categories. There are people who are in the category of Temporary Protected Status. These are people who may have come from some place, like Haiti during a hurricane or from an earthquake in Central America. They were in the United States, unauthorized, either they had temporary visas that ran out or they had come in unauthorized and various presidents have given them temporary protection. "We're not going to send you back to Guatemala City where you've just had a major earthquake. We're not going to send you back to Port-au-Prince, because it's chaos there."

What has happened is those protected status provisions have been re-upped. So, maybe it was initially for five years or 10 years and has kept going. Well, as a result, many of these people again have built lives here. They pay taxes, they work, they pay taxes. Some of them have had children who are US citizens. At a certain point, I think it's two-thirds of the people who are unauthorized in the United States today have lived here more than 10 years. At what point do you say, "We haven't done anything about this? We haven't solved this. We haven't even enforced our laws." At what point do you say, "This is crazy. We've got to change our law."

KRISTOL: So when you hear the number about the millions, that's some TPS, Temporary Protection Status, and some DACA, but a lot of them are just — Just, I mean, let's just say, illegal people who came across the border illegally or who are undocumented, who have been working, presumably?

CHAVEZ: Actually more of them are people who came here legally, but their visas expired.

KRISTOL: But their visas expired. Yeah. Whatever they're doing, they're doing and they're in limbo because we've never succeeded over years now, decades I guess, in passing legislation to rationalize or routinize, well, obviously to send them back, on the one hand or to — which would mean rounding them up and so forth, or to give them some path either to citizenship or to permanent resident status, I suppose. I mean, so that's where you hear the numbers about the million, right? They're just in this kind of limbo.

CHAVEZ: That's right. 10.5 million includes all of the above. By the way, just giving them the status to be here legally, I can remember back during the debates during the Bush years about bills, there was a lot

of polling done of the unauthorized population itself. A majority of them were fine with just let me be here and work. If you want to deny me citizenship, I may not like that, but I'm willing to accept that if that is the price to pay for getting legal status. I think there's some question about whether you wanted a two-tiered society, in which you have a group of people living here permanently who can never become citizens, but that was at least on the table as an option. That's never discussed now.

They are people who, as I say, they pay taxes. Again, Americans don't understand I think, that just because you are here illegally, you are not authorized to be here, if you're working, even though you're not supposed to be working, because we do have laws that say, "You must be here legally to work." Most of the seven and a half million people are in fact working and virtually all of them, well, all of them are paying some taxes, but virtually all of them are paying income taxes. If they work for an employer that withdraws money for FICA, for social security and Medicare, that comes out of their pay. Some of them have something called, an Employee Identification Number. That money goes into a file under that. Others are using social security numbers that are not their own. I wouldn't be surprised to find if there's a Linda Chavez out there, who's contributing to my Social Security. I mean, this this does happen, but that isn't harming me. That's not harming you. They're paying into the system.

All of them pay taxes, real estate taxes. If you rent a property, you are paying as part of your rent, taxes. Your landlord sets the rental price based on what he or she has to pay in taxes, in addition to other factors. So they all pay that. They all pay sales tax. So they are tax payers. They are contributing to the system, not to mention they're consumers. Many of these live in communities, small communities, in rural areas where they're the life blood of the community. They've started the stores, they're buying the cars, they're buying the houses. So, the idea that somehow these are free loaders is just wrong.

KRISTOL: So, I guess, how much could be achieved by the Biden Administration, simply doing a better job of making the current laws and regulations work better and maybe being more willing to take some criticism by letting more people in and going up to the maximums of the different limits and just streamlining administrative actions and so forth? How much really does require Congressional action? How much does the system just need to be fixed by Congress, I mean —

CHAVEZ: Ultimately, the system needs to be fixed. But it would certainly be better if, for example, we could get rid of that five million backlog. I mean, if the Administration said, "Look, this is a priority. We want to, at the very least, make it possible for people who are entitled to come here, because we said they are, and we're going to process their work." Then at least that would get done.

KRISTOL: But that would need Congress to say, you could —

CHAVEZ: Yeah, it would need money spent by the bureaucracy. It would need hiring people. It would need being more efficient. Most of all, it would need placing a priority on it. It would take Congress to fix the idea of using the unused visas that are available. I think the Muscatine Center has put out a paper really detailing how much money that would bring into our system if they simply did that and brought in these people and gave them their green cards and they became contributing members of American society.

So some of it has to have Congressional action, but part of it could be, at least, the beginning could be made to solve it by better administrative action.

KRISTOL: There could be some Congressional actions that would deal with parts of the system and not everything, right? I mean, you could do DACA just by itself.

CHAVEZ: That's right. That's right. In fact, I mean, this has been where the progressive have not always been helpful. The progressives know that, particularly Republicans, being more business friendly, they want to fix the H1-B program that brings in certain kinds of people and work visas. They want to fix certain other things. The progressives don't necessarily want those dealt with, because their fear is, "Well, they'll deal with those and then they'll never get to the big enchilada." Well, we haven't got to the big enchilada in all these years. So I would say, a slice of bread is better than no bread. I think that's

unwise and it's a symptom of our politics today, is that it's all or nothing. We can't sit down and really compromise and decide what's really necessary and what we could do now and quickly. We always want to aim for the big picture, which may be unattainable.

KRISTOL: Do you think the current Republican party is so interested in even talking about some slices of bread, or is it just so Trumpified that no one will step up and do that?

CHAVEZ: It's a little hard to know. I mean, obviously the Republican party is very Trumpified and when you talk about election or election reform, that kind of issue, certainly that's not going to go anywhere with this group of Republicans.

On the other hand, the election, the 2020 election, I've been writing about this for decades, literally, that Hispanics were in fact more likely to vote Republican than most other minority groups, certainly more so than black Americans. It turned out to be true. It turned out that, even in south Texas, along the border, a lot of Mexican Americans like Donald Trump, more men than women liked him, but they voted for him. So I think the Republicans are recognizing that.

Certainly, Glen Youngkin who just won election in Virginia, I think he made aggressive outreach to the Hispanic population of Virginia, which is a growing portion of that state's population. I think was only about 5%, I think, but 5% can make the difference between winning or losing an election. So around the edges, I think you could get some movement by some Republicans.

I can remember a discussion I had with Mark Meadows back when he was in Congress, as opposed to Chief of Staff at the White House, in which we talked about immigration and he acknowledged to me, "We have to fix the problem with agricultural workers." He represented an agricultural area. He knew that they needed workers. He knew that the current system didn't allow them to be brought in. So if you could, in fact, come up with a series of bills that dealt with specific problems, it's possible you could do it and it wouldn't even be a major story. It wouldn't even be something that Trump and Fox and others could rail about. I wouldn't bet the farm on it —

KRISTOL: The trouble is, is that they would rail, and therefore this gets back to your earlier point, that you need leadership on the other side to make the case, because I mean you can't just — it's not like Tucker Carlson is going to not know that — The anti-immigration types aren't going to be alert to attempts to do things.

I do think Youngkin — if you want to take the glass half full, we're talking on November 3rd, I guess, the day after Youngkin's victory in Virginia. If you want to take the glass half full, from at least my point of view, account of Youngkin's victory. I mean, he accommodated Trump in all kinds of ways I don't like at all, but I will say this, on immigration he said nothing basically. Whereas Ed Gillespie in 2017 at the height of the Trumpist hysteria, a year after Trump had won the presidency, partly on immigration, was going on about the borders and illegal immigrants here in Virginia. So maybe there is a damping down of the anti-immigration fervor amongst some Republicans, at least, that would give a chance for the Lindsay Grahams' of the world to be reemerge in Congress next year as a force for good.

On the other hand, it's an election year. Actually, you look at the people who are running for the Senate, you see the hysteria in Ohio and Pennsylvania and other states where you might once have had more reasonable Republicans. What do you think the overall — I don't know, and Trump's still there and he's—

CHAVEZ: Right. Trump is still there. Although, he does talk about it at his rallies, but it's not the centerpiece right now of his message. His message now is all about how the election was stolen. I do have the feeling that it's receded a bit, in terms of the public awareness and public focus, even though we've had the little blips at the border with the kids coming in during the spring and the Haitians coming in, in the fall.

It's hard to know. It's one of those culture issues, visceral issues that has the ability to inspire the worst in people. So, it's hard to know whether or not you'd have enough courageous Republicans to do the right

thing. I think a good number of the Republicans on Capitol hill, not the Marjorie Taylor Greene's, certainly not, the Madison Cawthorn's, those people no, but the ordinary Republicans, I think they know that the system is broken and it's got to be fixed. I think as they're looking and seeing that maybe there are even some avenues to get Hispanics to vote Republican, they're thinking, "Well, maybe I shouldn't engage in this hateful rhetoric." So, I guess I'm a glass half full person.

KRISTOL: No. I mean, the Trumpists take some pride in the fact that Trump did better among Latinos, among Hispanics. So there's a way there too, that takes the edge off the immigration message, because you can't quite at the same time say they're a horrible threat to the America we love and we're proud that they're voting for us. I mean, I guess you could say that, but it's a little incoherent.

So let's get to the Democrats. Ultimately, to make this happen, you'd need, I think, don't you think, I mean, presidential leadership? More than presidential, well, presidential leadership to pull actual members of Congress together and then leadership to pull civil society and advocacy organizations together, to get people behind whichever pieces of legislation — assuming it's not going to be a comprehensive bill — that could be passed and put other things on back burners and stuff. You need actual — Someone needs to — It's not going to happen. I don't think spontaneously, right?

CHAVEZ: It's not.

KRISTOL: I mean, maybe there'll be some good people in the House and the Senate who just get together and make this happen, a gang of eight, but it feels like you'd need — You have an administration that's nominally committed to all kinds of immigration reforms, so I get back to the Democrats. Is there a chance that they will pivot to this? Is it too hard to do in 2022? Is it too much resistance within the Democratic Coalition?

CHAVEZ: I think there are two things. I think they've got their eyes focused on the big money items, like the bill that's yet to pass as of November 3rd, but hope springs eternal in the Democratic heart that it will pass. So I think they're distracted by that. But again, there hasn't been the kind of leadership, there hasn't been someone who's taken this issue and run with it. The new Senator from California, Alex Padilla, his parents actually came to the United States illegally. He grew up worrying about his parents being deported. He's the type of person who could take a huge leadership role on this. I wish he would.

But you do, you have to have somebody who's willing to make this their number one issue. And the Hispanic caucus has never been as effective as a political caucus as some of the other caucuses have, the progressive caucus, the black caucus. They just haven't seemed to be able to garner the enthusiasm around their issues. And obviously, Hispanics get irritated when you say — act as if immigration should be a Hispanic issue. It isn't the number one voting issue for Hispanics. It's actually far down the list, but there is an emotional tie there. And so, I think you're going to have to have somebody who has that Ted Kennedy fire in his belly, who's willing to go out there and take this to the people.

The business community also has not played the most positive role. They're starting — You see ads now, at least on cable TV, about the role of immigrants and particularly the essential workers that we absolutely need and depend on, many of whom are foreign born, some of whom are not here legally. But the business community needs to focus on it.

I can tell you, I sit on a corporate board of the largest janitorial company in the country. It's a public company, part of the New York Stock Exchange. Our biggest worry is about the labor shortage. We can't find people to take those jobs as janitors, cleaning buildings. The pandemic, in some ways, gave us breathing room because buildings shut down and we weren't doing as much cleaning, but now when they're opening up and we've got jobs that we can bid on, we have to come up with a way to find people to take those jobs. And they aren't there.

And the progressives say, "Well, if you pay them enough." Well, the fact is you can't pay \$30, \$40, \$50 an hour for somebody to clean an office building at night. It's not going to happen. It's not economically feasible. And so, you do need people who are coming in, for whom this is a good job, it's a job that will

provide their kids a better life. But they don't have a lot of other alternatives. They don't have college degrees. They don't often have the English language skills that allow them to get white color work. So again, just finding a leader. We need a leader.

KRISTOL: Yeah. And I don't think the CEO of any company, I don't know your company, is going to, on his or her own, start calling Senator Cornyn in Texas or Senator Rubio in Florida, and many other Republicans and say, "Hey, come on. Look, let's bracket these other fights we're having about culture and whatever you want, all these other things. Can't we just agree on a more reasonable green card program, or more reasonable way to help more, get more people into these jobs? Which everyone agrees, including your own constituents, your own business supporters, they should get." Or can't we legalize the Dreamers, which are also a lot of their constituents.

But I come back, I guess, to Biden and the administration. It's pretty hard, when you have a president of a party, it's a little hard for senators and congressmen from that party to really step up beyond the administration. They can do it sometimes. Jack Kemp did it as a Republican, Ted Kennedy did it as a Democrat, but it's still not quite — It's harder. And I guess that comes back to the administration not making this a priority, really, in its public rhetoric or in its legislative strategy. It is striking, if you — Infrastructure, infrastructure, infrastructure. And I don't know, I guess you just can't do two things at once maybe, but I don't know. What do you think happens over the next year or three years of —

CHAVEZ: Well, I am hopeful that maybe there will be some small fixes. I think this recapturing visas, that's a fix that probably wouldn't be that controversial. It's the kind of thing you might be able to stick in a bill and get through.

I do think you're going to see big changes in refugees because we have this population of Afghans. But making the case that we need a million and a half immigrants every single year in order to sustain our economy, in order to grow as a nation, in order for the rest of us to prosper, that's an argument that can only be made by the top leadership. And as I say, I just don't think President Biden has it in his gut. It's just not — When he talks as a lunch pail guy in Scranton, from Scranton, you can tell some of these are issues that he really feels strongly about, but I don't think he feels that strongly about this. I just don't think it's where his heart is.

And unless somebody else comes up and — Secretary Mayorkas, whom I had great hopes for, he's been very challenged in this job. And I don't blame him. He's been handed a bad set of facts and had to deal with them. But you don't get the impression that he's on speed dial from the Oval Office either. And that's the other thing. If you're not in that inner circle, and if the people in your inner circle do not see this as a big issue — I can't think of a person in the White House or anywhere for whom this is a huge priority. I just, off the top of my head, I can't think of anyone.

KRISTOL: Now, given the extent to which there was a genuine, widespread reaction against Trump on immigration, a genuine sense that we got to get serious about that issue. And I think that was a very strong reaction. Of course, on the left, among Democrats, but among anti-Trump, or even not anti-Trump Republicans, as well, as you say, you see it with Youngkin not picking up at least the demagoguery on it. It's amazing how little I think has been — Worrisome —

CHAVEZ: Yeah. In the first few days of office, he issued this very broad proclamation of what he wanted to do in immigration, 90% of which I agreed with and thought was a good plan, but then it went nowhere.

KRISTOL: Is that right? And he hasn't really come back to it.

CHAVEZ: He hasn't really come back and said, okay, well, let's do this or that. And again, I think he's worried about jeopardizing the rest of his agenda. I was on Jake Tapper's show a while back, and Paul Begala was on with me. And I made this impassioned plea for immigration reform and why wasn't the Biden administration dealing with it, it's an urgent problem. And Paul Begala said, "It isn't urgent. He has urgent problems. And there are important issues and urgent issues. This may be an important issue, but it's not an urgent issue." I beg to differ. I think it is an urgent issue.

KRISTOL: Yeah, and one way in which it is urgent is if you don't make progress now, I don't think you can count on the Republicans or large part of the public staying in, let's call it the Glenn Youngkin position. There will be some other stuff at the border, and there will be some incidents somewhere in America where some immigrant does something, undocumented immigrant does something terrible. And then, it'll be demagogued again, and we'll go back, in a way, to 2015, '16, seems to me. I think it's a mistake of the Democrats to assume that if they don't begin to resolve this problem —

CHAVEZ: Agreed.

KRISTOL: — they can have a status quo of a low simmering problem that can be dealt with five years from now. And meanwhile, they can do this other stuff. That just doesn't feel right to me, actually.

CHAVEZ: Yeah. When you think about it, 10 and a half million people. They get up every day, they go to work, they try to provide for their families. They have to be looking over their shoulder. If you talk to some of these communities, the only place they feel safe is in church, because there isn't usually enforcement at the church. They're afraid to pick up their kids at school. They're afraid they can't go to PTA meetings. They're worried that they're going to be picked up. Some of them, I think, are the best drivers in America because God forbid they should be pulled over because they have a broken taillight or they've gone five miles over the speed limit.

So, they live lives of terror and it's not right. It really is, it's a humanitarian issue. And when you think of their children, kids can lose their parents. They can come home from school, and their dad has been picked up at the construction site, and their mom has left or maybe she too has been picked up.

I lived through some of these raids when I was on the board of a different company, Pilgrim's Pride, back in 2008, when the chicken factories were raided. People's lives were incredibly disrupted. And by the way, Pilgrim's Pride was an early adopter of E-Verify. We didn't hire you if your papers weren't verified, but doesn't mean that people couldn't come up with phony IDs, and that worked.

But I can remember that board was made up of a lot of good old boys from Texas and all Republicans, 100%. And I can remember the way they talked about what it was like the day of that raid. And one of them described it to me as he said he felt like he was in Nazi Germany and the storm troopers were at the door. He said he couldn't believe the way they showed up at the processing plant with balaclavas over their faces and black armor and looking like they were breaking into a drug cartel, all to take people who were working at low wage jobs and trying to provide for their families, and sending them home. It was —

KRISTOL: Is that happening now, or is that at least paused —

CHAVEZ: Well, that has stopped. The Biden administration, internal enforcement, they basically have prioritized who should be deported. And interior enforcement, they will go after the bad actors. So there was another meat processing company in Iowa, for example, that was really doing terrible things, treating their workers very badly, and were indeed manipulating the system. That kind of employer should be gone after. You should not have an employer who is hiring people who are unauthorized, because he knows that he can treat them like non-entities, not pay them, bad working conditions. You don't want that. So those kinds of employers should be gone after. But the idea of picking up the landscaper and treating the landscaper the same as you would somebody was a member of MS-13, that's crazy. And yet —

KRISTOL: But I suppose the Biden administration, if they're not doing that, which is good, in my opinion and yours, maybe that takes a little of the pressure off, and they can say, "Okay, look, things are better. We're not going to have the nightmare —"

CHAVEZ: Yeah. But they're —

KRISTOL: Yeah, there's still uncertainty over these people and their kids.

CHAVEZ: It's the sword of Damocles that hangs over these people's heads and their kids' heads. Again, there are kids, even beyond the DACA recipients now, there are kids who were brought five years ago or 10 years ago, who are not yet eligible to even apply for DACA. And by the way, that judge shut down future applications. There is no way to apply for DACA now. The existing population that's in it may have some reprieve, but there's no new applicants being taken. And they don't have any hope. They're going to live in the shadows. They're going to live their entire lives in the shadows, and so are their kids.

KRISTOL: And just to close then, to come back to a couple things we discussed a bit, but on the Democrats, I guess also how much — I guess I come back to the question, thinking about the 2019, 2020 Presidential debates and the degree to which you had to be almost for open borders to stay on the stage, it seemed, and how much pressure would there be from the left, both more broadly and then actually in Congress, even, if the Biden administration tried to do some modest things, but didn't try to do everything, and were willing to do a little more border enforcement as a price to get some Republicans? Does that just become very, very difficult for the Democrats? They can't get to the deal the way they did in 2013, where they got almost every Democrat in the Senate for a bill that included stuff that was pretty tough on the border, if I'm not mistaken.

CHAVEZ: Yeah, that's right. And look, the problem with the border is not the future landscaper or poultry worker, it's that some very bad people can come in that way as well. And in fact, what we're seeing at the border now, even in terms of the unauthorized population and showing up there, huge numbers of people that are not from Mexico or Central America. Haitians are the latest. Venezuelans are coming up, other South Americans, but also people from the Middle East. Afghans, people from Pakistan, people from Africa that are trying to come that way. And most of these people I'm sure are good, hardworking people who just want to have a better life, but some bad apples can get through too. So we do have to have border enforcement. We have to have a system that works.

I don't know what the progressives would do. Maybe the progressives will be somewhat chastened by the election yesterday. Maybe they will look and say, we've overstepped, overreached. Remains to be seen with somebody like Congresswoman Jayapal or Omar or any of the Squad, whether or not they will come to their senses or not. But part of it is going to be the advocacy community, the immigrant community itself saying, look, we want something done. Even if we can't get everything we want done, we want at least some things done. And we'll see.

KRISTOL: That seems important because it seems right now that you've got the worst, if you're a Democrat or pro-immigration advocate, you've got the worst of both worlds. You've got all the — You're not making much progress in reality. And you're still out there, exposed, so to speak, to the anti-immigration forces and demagogues, and the next time there's a problem with the border, and there's going to be one, right? So, I think it's not a — They may think this is an acceptable status quo for now, but I'm a little dubious that it's sustainable, I guess, is the way — Leaving aside even the injustices and the practical problems of not having workers and sword of Damocles over other workers' heads and so forth. I just wonder how sustainable it is, which I guess — It would be my last question.

What do you think happens if just analytically, leaving aside what we would like, in 2022 in Congress, do you think the issue comes back up in a bad way or not so much in 2022, 2024? What's your prognosis?

CHAVEZ: Some of it will depend on what happens to the legislative proposals that are out there right now. Some of it will depend on whether or not the pro-immigrant folks are able to get at least a few little tweaks to the system in through the reconciliation bill. 2022 is going to be a tough year. We didn't see normal legislative process this year. There's no way in hell that we're going to see it next year, in an election year. Congress just doesn't work the way it used to. And I worked on Capitol Hill. I started off my political career in Washington, working in the Judiciary Committee in the House. We used to have hearings, and we used to consider legislation. It would be amended. It would go to the floor for a vote and there would be further amendments. It would be debated. And we got big things done back in those days, including the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which when you go back and read the floor debates on that, was just remarkable that that passed in the way in which it did. We don't do those things anymore.

KRISTOL: 2013 is not ancient history, though. And that's exactly what happened in the Senate, really.

CHAVEZ: Yes, that is. Yeah.

KRISTOL: But not now, I think.

CHAVEZ: But then, Rush Limbaugh and company killed it in the House, and that's exactly what happened. And George W. Bush knew that. I remember I had a conversation with him at the White House, at an event in which we talked about the role of the right wing media killing that bill. They can be a force for great harm. And Tucker Carlson is probably smarter than anyone since Rush Limbaugh, and he's got a huge audience, and he is virulently anti-immigrant.

KRISTOL: Yeah, that makes you — And so if nothing much happens in '22, it's sitting out there as an issue for Republicans to demagogue going into 2024. Trump himself, of course, but also people who want to succeed Trump, if Trump doesn't run.

And on the Democratic side, it doesn't feel to me — It still feels to me that the primary dynamic, the dynamics in the primaries — I don't know, if Biden doesn't run, let's say, would still be very, very hard to sound like you are sounding today, in being willing to say that there are some bad actors trying to come across the border, and some of the enforcement's necessary, and we can't just do away with ICE. You could change its name, but you're going to have to some human beings who work for the federal government who are doing immigration control and enforcement. It's —

CHAVEZ: Yeah.

KRISTOL: So that's a somewhat real —

CHAVEZ: We're not Europe. We don't have the European Union, where you can go through borders. And even during the pandemic, the borders in Europe were not open. So yeah, we're not going to ever get to that point. And hopefully, there'll be at least some modest changes, and hopefully we won't be having this conversation three years hence and having the same exact conversation again.

KRISTOL: No, that would be — Well, we will have this conversation again, I really hope before three years, and I hope it's a happier one. And I suppose in a way, the upside might be that doing some things, even if they're incremental and modest, or especially if they're incremental and modest, on immigration could become an example for other areas as well. Get out of this “all or nothing” politics and so forth.

But it does require leadership from within both parties. Maybe they'll be a little more openness to some Republicans. Maybe some Democrats will get a little worried after yesterday. Maybe the Biden administration will realize that they can pass — honestly, I even think as a practical matter politically, they're crazy to think the infrastructure stuff is all positive and the immigration stuff's all negative. I think, in fact, a lot of voters look at the \$3.5 trillion and say, “Oh my God, that's an awful lot of money. Typical Democrats —”

CHAVEZ: When they look at the DACA kids and they say, “Why are we preventing him from getting his medical degree and working at my local hospital?”

KRISTOL: Yeah, I agree totally. If they spent one-tenth of the time on DACA that they've spent on infrastructure, they'd be politically better off, not worse off. And they might get some Republicans who would look a little more like the original infrastructure bill, where they would get some Republican support, perhaps, if they gave Republicans something on some border enforcement. And look, if some of the left progressives in the House that want to support it, they probably could get some Republicans. But again, none of it happens if you don't try to make it happen, right?

CHAVEZ: Yep. Have to have the will. There has to be the political will.



KRISTOL: Well, that's a good note to end on. I don't know if that's a glass half full or a glass half empty note, but it's a true note. So Linda, thanks an awful lot for joining me today. We will have this conversation again, and it is an important issue, I just think, for the country, both morally and socially and culturally, as it were, in terms of this being a nation of immigrants and all. I've been more struck by that in recent years really than I had before, I've got to say. I've always known it, but just how important it is for the spirit of the country. And then practically, just in terms of economic growth and prosperity, it's crazy, our current situation.

CHAVEZ: It's who we are as Americans.

KRISTOL: Yeah. And we should — Yes. And this is a happy case where I think being truer to who we are as Americans would actually be just practically good in the short term. Sometimes you do pay this trade off. You pay some price for doing the right thing. I think in this case, the values and the interests are aligned, but we just need to get some political leadership, as you said. So Linda, thanks a lot for joining me today. We'll do it again.

CHAVEZ: Thank you.

KRISTOL: And thank you for joining us on CONVERSATIONS.

[END]