

The Road to El Dorado?

Reading time: 4 mins

by Paul Willax

Each of us has a big stake in the future of our great nation. Accordingly, we should be keenly aware of the complexities and probable impacts of the crisis that is mushrooming at our southern border.

Joe Biden was right when he opined that the stream of migrants heading to the United States wasn't driven by a shared belief that he's a "nice guy." The causes – and effects – of this unprecedented phenomenon are far more complex, and threaten to produce a tragedy in which scant few will be perceived as "nice."

As business leaders with a big stake in the future of this nation, we should be aware of the complexities of this issue.

Most observers believe that this surge of asylum-seekers was prompted by oppressive conditions in the refugees' homelands, coupled with an expectation that, once they cross the 30th parallel, they will win a spot in the legendary realm of "El Dorado." However, it can be safely speculated that the only winners in this will be politicians seeking laurel wreaths and follow-on votes; business moguls in search of cheap labor and new customers; coyotes pursuing mucho dólares; and cartel traffickers trying to build an enduring clientele.

Sadly, the biggest losers might well be the young people being lured by milk and honey. President Biden claimed that a large majority of the travelers are youths who are seeking a better life. But this view begs an important question: "Will these travelers *really* be better off as a consequence of their harrowing journey?" To many who have seriously thought this forward, the answer is a disheartening "NO."

During their 1500-mile journey, migrants' health has been compromised by the hazards of climate, malnutrition, and terrain. Further, it's been widely alleged that sexual predators, financial grifters, and drug pushers have also taken their toll and will probably continue to do so in the future even if entry to the U.S. is granted. (You can be sure that traffickers have taken names and U.S. destinations for their databases.)

Let's take measure of the possible losers in this quest.

Just pause and imagine how you would have felt as a 17 year-old if you were harshly shuttled (perhaps sold) through hundreds of miles of hostile territory only to arrive alone, amidst a horde of strangers, at a sterile and impersonal depot (jail?) where you will be processed by "aliens" who, while well-meaning, have little experience and muddled visions of their goals. You have little understanding of what is happening to you, due to language barriers and the chaos surrounding you.

So far, your status is not what you expected. Your dreams probably sparked your journey and, perhaps parents with good intentions – and profiteers without them – have abetted your leap into a terrifying

world that you “hope” will get better as you stumble ahead. You are fatigued and feel unwell, menaced from all quarters. Unsettling rumors abound. You’re surrounded by many fellow travelers but probably no true friends. Adrift and far from home, you are stranded, physically, mentally, and emotionally. “Authorities” you cannot understand confront you.

What’s next? Yesterday Mixco, Guatemala; today Matamoros, Mexico; tomorrow Missoula, Montana?

Looking forward, you wonder how you will function, alone in a strange – ill-omened – environment. Who will arrive to provide you with a meal, a med, or a sincere “Atta boy?”

You ask yourself, “*Dónde está mi casa?*”

It dawns on you that you are facing a very uncomfortable – if not treacherous – gap between hopeful expectations and harsh reality.

Even if you get to cross the “line” and gain asylum, daunting challenges await. What does your future hold? Probably *not* long-term professional assistance and guidance. Probably *not* adequate resources to get established.

Probably more confusion and consternation. Probably more desperation and want because, in the great “hustle” that is unfolding, émigrés – especially the young and unaccompanied – are, unfortunately, being handled as commodities not souls. American “rescuers” don’t have the time, resources, preparation, or experience to do much more than “move you along.”

How are all these uncertainties affecting your aspirations, intentions, and self-concept? Are you still you? Who must you become to survive and prosper?

Many unaccompanied youths have no one to take them in. Even those with pre-arranged receptions will, in too many cases, be stood up. Some “helpers” will turn out to be exploiters who see opportunities to profit from cheap labor and the interception of benefit payments, food stamps, etc.

Claims that background checks of receiving families and friends are being done are not very convincing, given that many such checks – even for guns and credit – have proven notoriously ineffective. Unfortunately, under the prevailing circumstances, thorough inspections like those conducted for legal adoptions are not feasible. In reality, even the most sincere receiving hosts will probably not be able to provide the kind of continuing, economic and emotional assistance that frail, psychologically scarred travelers are going to need.

The surge in immigration raises other serious questions. Will immigrants suffer debilitating disappointment with respect to their introductory circumstances? Will loneliness spark depression and despair? Will hopeless homelessness be the ultimate fate of travelers who began their journey full of hope? How many will be so seriously disaffected that they become mutinous?

Will émigrés be haunted by guilt over their actions to grab good fortune while leaving others behind?

Of course, language will be a barrier to almost every avenue of advancement, as will be the lack of

employable skills. What kinds of meaningful work will be available? How can necessary training and education be provided to develop workers who are able and up for opportunity?

Will opportunities for integration and socialization emerge? How will these refugees be regarded by other naturalized citizens who labored mightily to gain entry to this nation? What will be the reaction from citizens who might feel relatively disadvantaged by the many new competitors for jobs and housing? Will even more ethnic and racial division and discrimination result? Will conflict develop within minority and ethnic groups? An old adage warns, “Your dream is not everybody’s dream.”

What about carryover dangers? For example, it’s reported that cartel related traffickers often “gifted” their charges with drug, alcohol, and sex addictions to ensure a future expansion of the predators’ customer bases in the U.S. Has this road to “El Dorado” become a road to perdition? Family-like support and public assistance are going to be critical to the avoidance of these damaging possibilities. Will they be there?

To make émigrés’ American experiences worth the march, it will be essential for our public and private sector leaders to identify worthy families and individuals who are up to the job of acclimating, supporting, and coaching apprehensive folks who will surely be intimidated by their new environment. Will novice hosts have the personal constitution and capacity to help their new guests shape themselves into productive, satisfied, and contributing members of society?

Will American citizens be able – and willing – to provide the emotional, familial, and substantive assistance that is going to be needed? Will we be up to convincing our voting taxpayers, who are still chasing their dreams, that this resettlement effort is within their capacities? Can they be primed for the successive aid supplements that will most surely be required of them in the near future? How will they react to inevitable incidents of failure along the way? To elicit the support needed, our government must be candid and specific – upfront – about the necessary inputs and desired outcomes entailed in this massive undertaking.

A lot of our desired results will depend on how our international detractors and our domestic media and “thought leaders” interpret this event for apprehensive Americans. How do we muster their cooperation and deter biased, unfounded, and self-serving intrusions?

The key queries: Will we, as a nation and individually, be able to live up to the obligations that are inherent in the rapid admission of huge numbers of eager but ill-prepared foreign aspirants to our ranks? What kinds of public and private programs must be put in place to provide help and prevent harm? How do we nurture enduring trust among all parties? Who will lead us in this mission?

This is going to be an enormous job, and we had better get it right. The entire world is watching intently. Some elements are skeptically hoping that we succeed; others are fervently hoping that we fail.

Unless we can answer the questions posed in the preceding paragraphs, the frenetic expansion of America that is underway at present will not end well. Indeed, in the final analysis, our political moguls and commercial titans might be the only winners in what appears, at this time, to be an ill-conceived and poorly executed quixotic venture.

Nevertheless, we all still might emerge as victors *if* we can productively, compassionately, and affordably assimilate the bold, ambitious, hopeful, and eligible asylum seekers who are waiting at our gates. But, to undertake – much less accomplish – such a gigantic task, we will have to put on our “big boy/big girl pants” and *think it forward*.

This is only the beginning; we *all* have a long way to go to finish what we have started.

Paul Willax, a retired Distinguished Professor, is an entrepreneur, author, and media commentator.