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Hate creeps in? Opponents of amnesty aren't the problem

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Hate speech is often defined as words that insult, disparage or threaten groups or individuals because of their race, color, ethnicity, national origin, gender, sexual orientation or religion. But whether the debate over immigration has gotten so harsh that it qualifies as hate speech depends on a host of factors.

Recently, pro-immigration groups such as Blue-Latinos.org, La Raza, and the Southern Poverty Law Center, which monitors hate groups, have used a broad brush to label the senators who voted against the immigration bill, some talk radio commentators and TV news show hosts, such as Lou Dobbs, as haters, nativists and xenophobes who are responsible for unleashing a wave of hatred across the nation. In fact, the label of hater has been so loosely applied that it might include anyone who raises objections about amnesty,

border security or the lack of enforcement of existing laws.

This is a most unfortunate turn of events. It's counterproductive for American democracy, and it weakens the credibility of those advancing the allegations. The Senate bill that died last month died because it was flawed legislation that would have worsened the problem.

Pro-immigration forces have invested too much of their energy and rhetoric in pretending that amnesty is a win-win for America and that the only victims are illegal residents and their children. This is hogwash of the highest quality. Victims of illegal immigration include people from every race and ethnic group who find themselves in the class of citizens who compete with low-skill immigrants for jobs, housing, education, health care and other goods and services. Victims also include everybody who finds themselves disadvantaged by greater congestion and pollution.

We are doing a great disservice to America and to free speech if we kill the messenger whenever someone makes a statement with which we disagree. Indeed, there are real haters with real threats in America who need to be exposed. By crying wolf because one has lost a fair fight only serves to undermine the leaders of the immigrant rights movement and their allies who have taken to maligning respectable people.

In 2002, I published a book called *The New White Nationalism in America* in which I issued a warning about a converging set of conditions creating a devil's brew for racial and social unrest. The conditions I identified included high levels of legal and illegal immigration, declines in high-paying, low-skill jobs due to globalization and structural changes in the economy, continued resentment over affirmative action, fear of crime and an over-emphasis on identity politics and group pride. I argued that these were working collectively to create a potentially explosive situation.

The remedy for decreasing hate groups and hate crimes includes a healthy national dialogue that

welcomes honest debate about issues that make us uncomfortable. Instead of throwing insults at mainstream voices, we ought to applaud the brave men and women who value our democracy enough to educate the public about issues that affect the health of our nation.

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