

Letter to the editor: Letter writer doesn't understand 'humanity'

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Posted: Saturday, October 30, 2010 12:00 am

By Shahid Haque-Hausrath |

In a letter this week, Phil Mooney asked me a question that I hear a lot: "What part of 'illegal' do you not understand?" It may seem appealing to boil the complex immigration issue down into a catchphrase, but we have to move past this simplistic view if we want to fix our broken immigration system. Therefore, I would ask Mr. Mooney to consider:

"What is it about humanity that you don't understand?"



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Immigrants come to the United States for many different reasons: to be together with family, to make a fair wage, to provide for themselves and their children, and to escape oppressive political and social conditions. To reduce undocumented immigration, we have to understand and address these root causes of migration.

Opponents of immigration reform use simplistic messaging and dehumanizing language to avoid putting a human face on the issue. The term "illegal alien" is just one example. This term is used as a noun, and casts an individual, as opposed to any actions that the individual has taken, as illegal. The term "illegal alien" implies that a person's existence is criminal.

Some people use this term because they think being out of status is a criminal violation of the law. This is not true - immigrants who are present in the United States without valid visas have committed a civil infraction, not an ongoing criminal violation.

Mr. Mooney is wrong that "illegal alien" is a descriptive term just like "bank robber." The term "alien" simply means non-citizen. Applying his reasoning, the correct term for a citizen who robs a bank would be "illegal citizen." Neither "illegal citizen" nor "illegal alien" are precise or accurate terms.

There are many conversations that we need to have about immigration reform, but we must begin by rejecting dehumanizing language and ideas.

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Helena

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