

Driver's licenses don't fix bigger problem

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Written by

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Guest Opinion

In less than a month, draft legislation granting driver's licenses to people here illegally became law. Next year Oregon joins a handful of other states in doing so.

Making it more convenient for people to live here unlawfully also invites a contingent of illegally present individuals to come here and cause serious harm to Oregonians.

Take the situation of Craig and Judy Cox from Newberg. In 1980, Judy was hospitalized and left with seizures for life after the car she was traveling in was hit by a drunken driver in the country illegally. A family friend in the car lost her life.

Fast-forward 27 years: Another person living here illegally drove drunk, then slammed his van into the Coxes' car, killing 66-year-old Judy and depriving 72-year-old Craig of his beloved wife.

This is just one instance that demonstrates that we need to be cautious about who can drive on Oregon roads. Additionally, if someone consciously chooses to break immigration laws, what other laws might they disregard?

Shortly after Judy's tragic death in 2007, in order to address concerns about fraud and other criminal activity, the Legislature changed the law to require proof of legal status to obtain a driver's license. A former administrator for the state Traffic Safety Commission also related to me the big problem Oregon had with fatal and injury crashes involving drivers without legal presence.

Besides claiming increased public safety by returning to the old system, supporters of the recently passed law say that granting driving privileges to people here illegally will ensure more drivers are insured. However, Oregon Department of Transportation studies show "no apparent impact on unlicensed/uninsured driving" following the change five years ago.

Testimony from some of the advocates said these new driver cards "help Oregon residents follow the law by providing their identity" and other things. Isn't it hypocritical for these same advocates to want illegal immigrants to "follow the law" for licensing but not for immigration? Why can't the rest of us pick and choose which laws we want to abide by without facing consequences? Where do we draw the line?

A constituent recently wrote, "We're going to document the undocumented." Issuing Oregon driver's licenses to people who aren't legally present is like granting state-sanctioned permission to be on our roads and, therefore, in our country.

Supporters argue undocumented residents are just seeking a better life for their families. However, good intentions don't outweigh the fact that they are disobeying the law. So, let's fix federal law to help good people from other countries navigate the process to live in the U.S. legally. Immigration can be great for our country. Breaking the law is not.

I'm concerned the new driver's licenses will not positively impact the number of insured drivers on the road, will roll back public safety, will encourage more people to live here illegally, and will give state-endorsed documentation to the undocumented.



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