

MOMENTUS OPPORTUNITY

Immigration is today's industrial revolution – let's not miss out

By GORDON QUAN

As the 2008 Summer Olympic Games have given way to political conventions, it is impossible not to reflect on immigration.

In the months to come, immigration will be used to stoke people's fears. But the Olympic Games illustrated the dramatic transformation that is underway around the world.

Immigration will remain a political hot button, but some are surprised to learn that it is not an issue unique to America. All over the world, people are moving – for people they love, for jobs they love and to places they love. Like the U.S., many countries lack adequate avenues for legal immigration, which inevitably results in people breaking the law to do what they believe is best for themselves and their families.

Understanding the lack of avenues for legal immigration to many countries, the United Nations last year convened its first annual conference on global migration, looking not only at immigration within legal guidelines, but what it calls "irregular" immigration. The United Nations has recognized these powerful forces motivating the movement of people and that harnessing these forces not only can help the receiving countries but also the sending countries.

According to a report from Goldman Sachs, immigration in Europe has outstripped inflows to America. In many European countries, the stock of the foreign-born population has never been higher. For instance, as much as 24 percent of the Swiss population was born elsewhere, as was 12 percent of Belgium's.

This transformation is scary to some, but for the generation that is entering the workforce, it is exhilarating.

Seeing immigrant athletes at the Olympic Games representing their adopted nations with pride provided a moment of clarity about what immigration can be. We saw that immigration is really about

breaking down barriers that separate people to achieve more.

It began with Lopez Lomong, a Sudanese refugee and distance runner, who was chosen by teammates to carry the U.S. flag during the opening ceremonies. Later, Lomong joined Bernard Lagat and Leonel Manzano, immigrants from Kenya and Mexico, to form an all immigrant U.S. contingent in the men's 1,500-meter run.

Gold medal gymnast Nastia Liukin came from Russia as a child. Her teammate, Shawn Johnson, has a coach, Liang Chow, who emigrated from Beijing. The team's coordinator, Marta Karolyi, came from Romania.

Beach volleyball gold medalist Phil Dalhausser came from Switzerland. The U.S. women's indoor volleyball coach is from China; the men's coach is from New Zealand. Gold medal winning wrestler Henry Cejudo's story garnered the most attention. The U.S.-born son of undocumented immigrants, Cejudo wrapped himself in the Stars and Stripes and declared the United States, "the best country in the world."

It is ironic that China was the backdrop. It was impossible to see the images of the Great Wall and not reflect on the efforts of the United States to construct a wall of its own.

When I recently visited the construction of the border wall with a delegation of political and community leaders, the Border Patrol told us that the edifice will slow the undocumented by four minutes at a cost of \$59 billion.

Such complex challenges can't be solved that easily.

The fact is that immigration is this generation's Industrial Revolution. Efforts aimed at holding back this global dynamism are bound to fail. Instead, the focus must be on how to derive the greatest be-



nefit from immigration while providing reasonable protections.

We must think of immigration in terms of opportunities and not obstacles.

Consider the European Union's planned "Blue Card" system, which empowers the individual worker. After a two year probationary period, the holder of a Blue Card can seek and gain employment in any member state without going through further immigration processes. Europe is transforming its approach to immigration to attract skilled workers by promoting flexible circulation of labor.

As the Olympic Games so clearly illustrated, the removal of real and imagined walls – through the spread of information and economic and political freedoms – has brought people around the world closer together than ever.

Constraining and complicating the system that allows people to move across borders – in America and elsewhere – will hurt businesses, stifle innovation and make it more likely that the U.S. will take a back seat to countries that embrace immigration.

The "us versus them" mindset has to be replaced by a "we" mindset.

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