Immigration Danger from Drug-Resistant TB

by Phyllis Schlafly

March 13, 2013

The United States practically eliminated tuberculosis many decades ago with our good hygiene and good drugs. But TB is coming back with a vengeance over our open border with Mexico and in a form that is highly contagious, fatal, and drug resistant.

We got a shock recently when the national news carried information about an illegal alien from Nepal carrying this ancient disease across our southern border illegally after traveling through 13 countries. He probably infected people all along the way.

This Nepal man is now in an Immigration and Customs detention facility in Texas in so-called medical isolation. We don't know how many of our U.S. Border Patrol and medical personnel may have been infected before his life-threatening disease was diagnosed.

A full-page account of the TB problem in the Wall Street Journal described in detail the worry of our health officials that our 2000-mile southern border could become a breeding ground for fatal, drug-resistant TB.

These diseased illegal aliens who show up on our doorstep in Texas and Arizona, requiring years of medication and isolation while being a danger to the lives of Americans assigned to care for them, are very costly. A recent CDC study estimates the cost of treatment on average to be $140,000, and some cases run as high as $700,000.

Tuberculosis is a debilitating disease that has shortened human lives since ancient times. It is caused by infectious bacteria that easily pass airborne from person to person through casual association, coughing and breathing.

Since 1950, TB has been fully treatable with drugs that cost pennies to make. The problem is the people

who quit taking their medicine as soon as they feel better, before the infection has been completely eliminated from the body. The vast majority of cases of MDR TB in the United States are with people born in other countries who have come to the U.S.

Irresponsible behavior by people all over the world, especially in developing countries such as India and Mexico, has led to an explosion of multi-drug resistant (MDR) and extensively drug resistant (XDR) versions of TB. Such cases are rampant in countries that supply cheap labor (both legal and illegal) to the United States.

During the heyday of immigration through Ellis Island, prospective immigrants were medically screened and sent back to their home country if there was evidence of TB. Today, instead of screening undesirable people at the border, we are asked to pay our health workers to treat them.

However, it's not enough to supply and dispense the anti-TB drugs. We have to watch them take their drug every day.

In the face of this costly disease invading us across our southern border, not only from but through Mexico, a couple of busybodies have been given space in the Wall Street Journal to broach a plan to dig up an unused clause of NAFTA to allow Mexicans without limit to work legally anywhere in the U.S. or Canada. The purpose is to make the U.S. border as open to workers as it has been for goods and investment.

That's a terrible idea on many counts. Opening our southern border for any or all Mexicans to work in the U.S. would not only mean an open door to disease, but also be a plan to make jobs go to foreigners instead of to the Americans and legal immigrants who are now swelling our unemployment rolls.

This off-the-wall proposal is a direct attack on American sovereignty. Americans should cry "shame" to all those who say that "the market" (rather than U.S. legislation) should decide who enters the United States. The decision as to who enters our country is part of the indicia of sovereignty, and if we give it away we would no longer be a sovereign republic.

One of the arguments made for NAFTA when it was rammed through Congress by Bill Clinton in 1993 was that it would reduce illegal immigration from Mexico by providing more jobs for Mexicans in their own country. That argument, made by many prominent people, was false then and is ridiculous now.

Our government should obey the law, and that includes the law that requires building a fence on our southern border. The fence law was signed by President George W. Bush, who staged a photo op of his signing to emphasize its importance.

The fence was never built. The government spent nearly $2 billion experimenting with a stupid “virtual” fence, which didn’t work and has been abandoned. We expect a fence like the one that works so well in San Diego: a 12-feet high double fence.