

A Legal Immigrant's Lament

In the late 1940s, my father, Kenneth Billingsley, [a veteran of World War II](#), was working in a mine in the northern reaches of Manitoba. So through no fault of my own, I was born a long way north of the border. Despite childhood stints in Alliance, Ohio, and Detroit, Michigan, when I sought to reside in the United States, the government imposed certain requirements.

I had to certify that I was not a member of the Communist Party, that I could understand and speak English, and that I would not become a public charge, a burden on American taxpayers. I didn't. Since gaining legal residency I have been gainfully employed and paying taxes as the law requires. Given that record, an April 17 article from the USC Center for Health Journalism Collaborative, headlined ["Will Undocumented Immigrants Avoid New State Health Benefits?"](#) came as something of a surprise.

The authors are Yesenia Amaro, who writes for the *Fresno Bee*, and Virginia Gaglianone of *La Opinion* in Los Angeles. Before that, Gaglianone "collaborated with KPFK 90.7 Pacifica Radio," an outfit whose website touts recently deceased Sandinista and FMLN supporter [Blase Bonpane](#) and [leftist icon Noam Chomsky](#).

Gaglianone and Amaro write of a Mexican national named Claudia Navarro, whose daughter suffered from spina bifida. Mexican doctors couldn't help her, so 27 years ago, the story goes, Claudia "brought her two young children to the U.S. to seek medical help. She obtained limited Medi-Cal benefits for her child, despite her immigration status, and arranged treatments that kept her daughter alive."

Medi-Cal is California's government health system for qualifying low-income people earning at [138 percent of the poverty level](#), which was \$33,534 for a family of four as of 2018. The authors do not spell out how Navarro "obtained" the

Medi-Cal benefits, or how she “arranged” the life-saving treatments for her unnamed daughter.

The language implies there might have been something improper about the process. The cost of spina bifida surgery can range as high as \$30,000, but the authors don’t quantify the U.S. taxpayer dollars spent on the child. And no word about where the father of the children is living now.

Gaglianone and Amaro do not indicate how Claudia’s unnamed child is doing at the age of at least 27, and the full adult is not quoted in the story. The authors do not explain whether Claudia, now 51 and living in Los Angeles, arranged any Medi-Cal benefits for her other unnamed and unquoted child. Likewise, the story does not say Navarro arranged any government benefits for herself, but she does seem to have some regrets.

“Now, 27 years later,” Gaglianone and Amaro explain, “Navarro worries that her decision to seek benefits could threaten her chances at becoming a legal U.S. resident.” She is “focused on proposed federal restrictions that would place new limits on who can qualify for a green card” and the broader definition of a “public charge”—essentially a “taxpayer burden” and an expanded list of federal taxpayer-funded public benefits that would count against immigrants, including food stamps and Medi-Cal.

Since Claudia entered the United States illegally, she never certified that she would not become “essentially a taxpayer burden.” According to the story, her reason for violating U.S. immigration law was to gain medical services for her daughter, all funded by U.S. taxpayers. Claudia also told the reporters that her adult children “are on Medi-Cal.”

Gaglianone and Amaro claim 1.5 million “uninsured and undocumented immigrants in California are forced to weigh the benefits and potential risks of using public services.” They

cite “Ana” who “asked to keep her real name confidential,” and has been waiting 30 years to become a U.S. resident.

Ana also worries about being denied “for having asked care for my children.” Her “older son,” who allegedly received taxpayer-funded care is not named or quoted, and readers get no clue what the mysterious “Ana” does for a living and whether U.S. taxpayers contribute to her livelihood.

According to an official [government Medi-Cal website](#): “You may qualify for health insurance through Medi-Cal even if you are not a U.S. citizen or a U.S. national,” and “You do not have to be a citizen or have satisfactory immigration status to qualify for Medi-Cal.” Those who meet eligibility requirements but lack legal immigration status are “entitled to emergency and pregnancy-related services and, when needed, state-funded long-term care.”

Medi-Cal wields a budget of [\\$20.7 billion](#) but does not quantify how much taxpayer money it spends on false-documented illegals. A ballpark figure for reimbursements from Mexico is zero, and by all indications, state and federal politicians are OK with that arrangement, a bad deal for U.S. taxpayers.

Meanwhile, over at Medi-Cal, information about immigration is “only used to verify status for Medi-Cal eligibility purposes.” And as the government health site also explains, “if you are not registered to vote where you live now and would like to apply to register to vote today please visit this [website](#) or call 1-800-345-VOTE (8683).”

Gaglianone and Amaro don’t say whether Claudia and Ana ever voted in the United States but according to a [State Department investigation](#), false-documented illegals have been voting in local, state and federal elections for decades. For all but the willfully blind, that’s a bad deal for legitimate citizens, legal immigrants, and the rule of law.

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