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May 12 marks the first anniversary of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement raid on Agriprocessors, Inc. in Postville.

It's not the kind of anniversary you would want to celebrate, however. The raid's human cost – devastation for many workers and their families and the negative effect on Postville's economy – was much too high for its perceived benefits. In fact, one of the raid's only real benefits was to shine a light on our country's broken immigration system and the urgent need to fix it.

The current system has led to much suffering. First, there is the matter of crossing the border, which is becoming more dangerous and more costly, taking a great human toll. With greater enforcement at some border sites, immigrants have been forced to use more dangerous locations, such as the Sonoran desert. It has been estimated that 2,000 undocumented people have died crossing the desert since 1998.

Then there is the exploitation that is a part of many immigrants' lives. Even in Iowa, where most people are decent and treat immigrants with respect, immigrants report exploitation by employers and landlords. Many undocumented immigrants and their families must live shadow lives among us, always looking over their shoulders, afraid to live normally.

And many are the target of distortions. Some say they don't pay taxes, for instance, but they pay billions of dollars in sales, income and property taxes each year, directly if they own property, and indirectly if they pay rent. According to the Social Security Administration, they pay as much as \$7 billion in Social Security and Medicare taxes every year, contributing as much as half a trillion dollars since 1984.

Others say undocumented immigrants don't want to learn English. But the experience of Hispanic immigrants is similar to the waves of European immigrants who came here in past decades. Typically, first generation immigrants are too busy surviving to learn English well. But studies show that 91 percent of second generation immigrants learn to speak English fluently or nearly so, and 97 percent do so by the third generation.

Then there are those who say undocumented immigrants who come across our southern border pose a risk of another 9/11. But 17 of the 19 terrorists of 9/11 were in this country legally with student visas and the other two had overstayed their visas. There is no evidence that our borders represent a high risk for a repeat of 9/11.

Fact is, the vast majority of undocumented immigrants come here for the same reasons our grandfathers and great grandfathers did – to escape poverty. The difference is, the U.S. then made it possible to do so legally. Now, it is next to impossible for someone from Mexico, El Salvador or Guatemala – or from any Latin American country – to come here legally. And despite our efforts to keep them out, few people will stay in their own countries where they lack access to jobs, health care, education, police protection and decent housing. Despite the fact that most immigrants would rather stay home if they had a choice, given the choices they have, no border wall will keep them out.

So what should be done? For starters, we must extend a hand to our neighbors south of the border, helping them to build up their economies and establish a more just economy – even while we're struggling to save our own. Then we must push the Congress and the Obama administration to pass comprehensive immigration reform. It should include a way for all undocumented immigrants currently in the country to work toward permanent residency. It

should allow for a greater number of immigrants to come here legally and allow family members to unite with their families here. It should create legal ways for migrant workers to come and work in a safe and humane way. Finally, it should provide due process for immigrants and abandon the border “blockade” enforcement strategy.

These are the most direct and practical ways to avoid noting many more anniversaries like the one marking the Postville raid on May 12.