

Wanted: Immigrants

by *The Indianapolis Star*

Going to great — even dangerous — lengths for a shot at the American dream and working hard for what's earned: It's long been part of this country's immigrant ethic. So it should surprise no one if far more immigrants than expected answer the call to join the U.S. military, which can be about as dangerous a job as exists.

The military, the New York Times reports, will begin recruiting immigrants who are in this country on a variety of temporary visas. The pilot program seeks 1,000 enlistees in its first year, targeting immigrants skilled in languages the military needs and for intelligence analysis and medical specialties.

Citizenship is a major incentive, occurring in less than six months for those qualifying. Though the military has long accepted immigrants who have green cards (about 8,000 a year), recruiting those on temporary visas is something of a departure, even if it has been allowed since soon after the Sept. 11 attacks.

A lesson here: While the rest of the country is often frozen into inaction by controversy, the military ponders its needs and acts. If ever there has been an issue on which this country has been frozen, it's been immigration.

No undocumented immigrant will be considered here. But here's the reality. Say the word immigration in a lot of circles, and voices and blood pressure rise. This is a significant step.

The military is looking for specific languages — including Arabic, Chinese, Hindi, Igbo (spoken in Nigeria), Kurdish, Pashto (spoken in Afghanistan and parts of Pakistan), Russian and Tamil. Spanish-speakers will not be eligible.

These languages are spoken in some of the world's hottest hot spots, in areas in which this country has some strategic interest or by allies and friends with whom our military has contact, during humanitarian missions, for instance. Spanish, too, is a strategic language, but there is no shortage of Spanish-speakers in the military. This is something else to consider if the temptation ever arises to demonize immigrants or their children. Who do we think many of these Spanish-speakers are?

The military's interest in actively recruiting more immigrants represents a triumph of pragmatism — a feat the rest of the country would do well to emulate when it comes to the larger immigration question. Reprinted From The Indianapolis Star. Distributed By Creators Syndicate Inc.

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