

IMMIGRATION

MYTHS

AND

FACTS



U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
Labor, Immigration & Employee Benefits

IMMIGRATION MYTHS AND FACTS



October 24, 2013

Dear Reader,

Despite the numerous studies and carefully detailed economic reports outlining the positive effects of immigration, there is a great deal of misinformation about the impact of immigration. It is critical that policymakers and the public are educated about the facts behind these fallacies.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Labor, Immigration & Employee Benefits Division last prepared this pamphlet in May 2011 to refute many of the most common myths about immigrants coming to our country. This report updates our 2011 pamphlet and examines new myths and facts that have emerged during the current immigration reform debate. We summarize the facts on the relationship of immigrants to Jobs, Wages, Taxes, Entrepreneurship, Population, Crime, Integration, Welfare, and Border Security.

Our compilation shows that immigrants significantly benefit the U.S. economy by creating new jobs, and complementing the skills of the U.S. native workforce, with a net positive impact on wage rates overall.

Recognizing that legislative solutions are difficult, the U.S. Chamber is also working to promote regulatory and policy reforms at the relevant federal executive agencies. We hope that these administrative reforms along with much needed legislation that overhauls our broken immigration system, will lead to concrete improvements so that our country can reap the full benefits of immigration.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce will continue to champion common-sense immigration reforms, and we urge you to join us in our efforts.

Randel K. Johnson

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Randel K. Johnson', written in a cursive style.

Senior Vice President
Labor, Immigration & Employee Benefits



JOBS

MYTH: Every job filled by an immigrant is a job that could be filled by an unemployed American.

FACT: Immigrants typically do not compete for jobs with native-born workers and immigrants create jobs as entrepreneurs, consumers, and taxpayers.

Employment is not a “zero-sum” game.¹ The U.S. economy does not contain a fixed number of jobs for which immigrants and native-born workers compete. For instance, if the eight million undocumented immigrant workers now in the United States² were removed from the country, there would not be eight million job openings for unemployed Americans.³ The reason for this is two-fold. First, removing eight million undocumented workers from the economy would also remove eight million entrepreneurs, consumers, and taxpayers. This would cause the U.S. economy to lose jobs. Secondly, native-born workers and immigrant workers tend to possess different skills that often complement one another, and are therefore not interchangeable.⁴

One of the principal ways in which immigrants create jobs is through the businesses they establish. Immigrants to our country join native-born Americans in being risk takers. According to the Kauffman Index of Entrepreneurial Activity, “immigrants were more than twice as likely to start businesses each month in 2010 than were the native-born.” This reflects an upward trend in immigrant entrepreneurship since 2006.⁵ Using

census data, the Partnership for a New American Economy estimates that immigrant-owned businesses “generate more than \$775 billion in revenue, \$125 billion in payroll, and \$100 billion in income, employing one out of every 10 workers along the way.” Moreover, “immigrants started 28 percent of all new U.S. businesses in 2011.”⁶

Immigrants play an important role in job creation in both small and large businesses. A report from the Fiscal Policy Institute found that immigrant-owned small businesses employed 4.7 million people and had \$776 billion in receipts in 2007, the last year for which data are available. In addition, 18 percent of all small business owners in the United States are immigrants, higher than the immigrant share of the population (13 percent) or labor force (16 percent).⁷ With respect to large businesses, a report from the Partnership for a New American Economy estimated that Fortune 500 companies founded by immigrants account for 18 percent (or 90) of all Fortune 500 companies, generate \$1.7 trillion in annual revenue, and employ 3.7 million workers worldwide. These companies include AT&T, Verizon, Procter & Gamble, Pfizer, Kraft, Comcast, Intel, Merck, DuPont, Google, Cigna, Kohl’s, Colgate-Palmolive, PG&E, Sara Lee, Sun Microsystems, United States Steel, Qualcomm, eBay, Nordstrom, and Yahoo!⁸ Similarly, a 2008 study found that one-quarter of all engineering and technology-related companies established in the United States between 1995 and 2005 had an immigrant founder or co-founder, and that these companies had \$52 billion in sales and 450,000 employees as of 2005.⁹

Immigrants also create jobs as consumers. Immigrant workers spend their wages buying food,

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clothes, appliances, cars, and other products and services from U.S. businesses.¹⁰ Further, businesses respond to the presence of new immigrant workers by investing in new restaurants, stores, and production facilities.¹¹ The end result is more jobs for more workers. For instance, a study by the University of Nebraska, Omaha, estimated that spending by immigrants generated roughly 12,000 jobs for the state of Nebraska in 2006—including more than 8,000 jobs in the Omaha and Lincoln metropolitan areas.¹²

Leaving aside the role that immigrants play in job creation, the fact remains that most immigrant and native-born workers are not competing with each other, even in times of high unemployment.¹³ Most foreign-born workers differ from most native-born workers in terms of what occupations they work in, where in the country they live, and how much education they have. Even among less-educated workers, immigrants and native-born workers tend to work in different occupations and industries. If they do work in the same occupation or industry—or even the same business—they usually specialize in different tasks, with native-born workers taking higher-paid jobs that require better English-language skills than many immigrant workers possess. In other words, immigrants and native-born workers usually complement each other rather than compete.¹⁴

This dynamic is illustrated by the fact that cities experiencing high levels of immigration tend to have relatively low or average unemployment rates for African Americans. A 2012 analysis of census data by Saint Louis University economist Jack Strauss found that cities with greater immigration from Latin America experience lower unemployment rates, lower poverty rates, and higher wages among

African Americans. Latino immigrants and African Americans fill complementary roles in the labor market—they are not simply substitutes for one another. In addition, cities that have suffered the effects of declining population are rejuvenated by an inflow of Latino immigrants.¹⁵

Immigrants do not “steal” jobs from American workers. Immigrants come to the United States to fill jobs that are available, or to establish their own businesses. Research has found that there is no correlation between immigration and high unemployment at the regional, state, or county level.¹⁶ Nor is there any correlation between immigration and high unemployment among minorities.¹⁷ Immigrants go where the jobs are, or they create jobs on their own.

WAGES

MYTH: Immigrants drive down the wages of American workers.

FACT: Immigrants give a slight boost to the average wages of Americans by increasing their productivity and stimulating investment.

Immigrant workers increase the wages of native-born workers in two ways. First, immigrants and natives tend to differ in the amount of education they have, the occupations in which they work, and the skill sets they possess. The jobs which immigrants and natives perform are often interdependent. This increases the productivity of natives, which increases their wages. Second, the addition of immigrant workers to the labor force



stimulates new investment in the economy, which in turn increases the demand for labor, exerting upward pressure on wages.¹⁸

The average wage increase that native-born workers experience as a result of immigration is measurable. A 2010 report from the Economic Policy Institute estimated that, from 1994 to 2007, immigration increased the wages of native-born workers by 0.4 percent. The amount of the wage gain varied slightly by the education level of the worker. College graduates received a boost of 0.4 percent; workers with some college 0.7 percent; high school graduates 0.3 percent; and workers without a high school diploma 0.3 percent.¹⁹ Similarly, economist Giovanni Peri has estimated that, from 1990 to 2006, immigration increased the wages of native-born workers by 0.6 percent. College graduates experienced an increase of 0.5 percent, workers with some college 0.9 percent, high school graduates 0.4 percent, and workers without a high school diploma 0.3 percent.²⁰

Local-level studies have reached similar conclusions about the positive impact of immigration on wages. Studies of two communities that experienced a large influx of immigrants over a short time period (Dawson County, Nebraska,²¹ and Miami, Florida²²) found that wages increased—even for lesser-skilled workers who were most likely to be in competition for jobs with new immigrants. Likewise, a study of more than 100 cities by economist David Card found that the wages of natives tend to be higher in cities with large immigrant populations.²³

ECONOMY

MYTH: The sluggish U.S. economy doesn't need more immigrant workers.

FACT: Immigrants will replenish the U.S. labor force as millions of Baby Boomers retire.

The U.S. economy is facing a demographic crisis. Roughly 77 million Baby Boomers (one-quarter of the U.S. population) are now starting to reach retirement age.²⁴ This wave of aging over the next two decades will have a profound economic impact. Our Social Security and Medicare systems will be stretched to the breaking point. Labor-force growth will fall. And a smaller number of workers and taxpayers will support a growing number of retirees. Under these circumstances, immigrants will play a critical role in replenishing the labor force and, therefore, the tax base.²⁵

As the native-born population grows older and the Baby Boomers retire, immigration will prove invaluable in sustaining the U.S. labor force. Projections by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) indicate that, between 2010 and 2020, the U.S. population age 55 and older will increase by 21.7 million—reaching 96.3 million, or 36.6 percent of all people in the country.²⁶ As a result, “replacement needs”—primarily retirements—will generate 33.7 million job openings between 2010 and 2020. On top of that, economic growth is expected to create 21.1 million additional job openings.²⁷ In other words, demand for workers will increase. Yet as more and more older Americans retire, labor-force growth will actually slow, averaging only 0.7 percent between 2010 and 2020 (even with calculating current rates of immigration).²⁸ The

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rate of labor-force growth would be even lower over the coming decade if not for the influx of new immigrants into the labor market.²⁹

Immigrant workers will do more than replace retiring native-born workers in the labor force. They will also look after the retirees themselves. BLS expects that the aging of the U.S. population will generate a high demand for healthcare workers of all kinds, both high-skilled and lesser-skilled.³⁰ Between 2010 and 2020, employment is projected to increase by 34.5 percent in healthcare support occupations, 25.9 percent in healthcare practitioner and technical occupations, and 26.8 percent in personal care and service occupations.³¹ Many of these healthcare workers will, of necessity, be immigrants.

UNEMPLOYMENT

MYTH: At a time of high unemployment, the U.S. economy does not need temporary foreign workers.

FACT: Temporary workers from abroad fill specialized needs in specific sectors of the U.S. economy.

Although the unemployment rate for the United States as a whole remains relatively high, the demand for specific kinds of workers in particular sectors of the economy remains high as well. For instance, farm workers, nurses, high-skilled manufacturing workers, and high-skilled technology workers continue to be in short supply.³² Unemployment for Americans in some of these areas remains remarkably low. For

example, unemployment for the native-born is particularly low in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) occupations, such as petroleum engineers (0.1 percent), computer network architects (0.4 percent), nuclear engineers (0.5 percent), environmental scientists and geoscientists (1.2 percent), database administrators (1.3 percent), statisticians (1.6 percent), engineering managers (1.6 percent), and aerospace engineers (1.9 percent).³³ Under these circumstances, the U.S. economy would benefit from channels of legal immigration that are flexible enough to respond to labor shortages in particular occupations at a particular time and place. Temporary worker programs provide just the sort of flexibility that is required in many industries.³⁴ Moreover, evidence indicates that expanding the supply of temporary workers from abroad would not undermine wages or job prospects of native-born workers. This is true at both the high-skilled and lesser-skilled ends of the occupational spectrum.

Among the many types of temporary worker visas, the largest category is the “H,” which includes one subcategory for highly skilled workers and two for lesser-skilled workers. The H-1B is for highly educated and skilled professionals and is capped by Congress at 65,000 per year with an additional 20,000 visas available for immigrants with graduate degrees from U.S. universities. The H-2B program is intended for nonagricultural seasonal, peak load, or intermittent workers (landscaping, forestry, amusement parks, etc.) and is capped at a maximum of 66,000 per year. And the H-2A program is designed for seasonal farm workers. While this last program is not subject to any numerical cap, it is too cumbersome to respond to the often rapid fluctuations in agricultural labor



demand and is little used. Given that the kinds of work covered by the H-2A and H-2B programs require jobs that are seasonal or temporary in nature, they most clearly demand a temporary work force. However, in the case of all three programs, demand fluctuates with the condition of the U.S. economy—rising when times are good and falling when they are bad. The caps placed on the H-1B and H-2B programs have proven to be grossly inadequate when economic conditions are favorable.³⁵ For example, this year the H-1B cap was met within the first few days of the filing period preceding the fiscal year, and for several years the H-1B cap has been met before, or early in, the fiscal year.³⁶

Regardless of skill level, where U.S. employers first test the labor market to locate qualified and available workers already here, temporary workers from abroad fill gaps in the U.S. labor force and do not harm the employment prospects of native-born workers. In the case of the H-2A and H-2B programs, the lesser-skilled workers who obtain these visas find themselves in direct competition with few native-born Americans. A 2013 study by the American Enterprise Institute and ImmigrationWorks USA notes that the rising educational attainment of native-born workers suggests that few of them are in the market for the kinds of less-skilled seasonal jobs filled by H-2A and H-2B visa holders. According to this study, “in 1950, more than half of U.S.-born workers had not completed high school. Today the figure is less than 5 percent—compared to nearly one-quarter of immigrant workers.” In addition, less-skilled immigrant workers tend to work in different fields than less-skilled native-born workers. The study observes that “low-skilled Americans are twice as likely as low-skilled immigrants to work in

offices or administrative support jobs. They’re also twice as likely as immigrants to work in sales. In contrast, low-skilled immigrants are three times more likely than low-skilled Americans to fill farming, fishing and forestry jobs.”³⁷

Moreover, BLS projects that 29.5 percent of job openings from 2010 to 2020 will not require a high-school diploma, while an additional 39.7 percent will require no more than a high school education.³⁸ In other words, there will be too few less-educated native-born workers willing and able to fill all of the lesser-skilled jobs the U.S. economy creates. Lesser-skilled immigrant workers will fill this gap.³⁹

At the other end of the spectrum, the high-skilled recipients of H-1B visas fill available jobs in STEM occupations without “crowding out” or reducing wages for their native-born counterparts.⁴⁰ According to a 2013 report by researchers from The Brookings Institution, “evidence suggests that the H-1B program does help fill a shortage in labor supply for the occupations most frequently requested by employers. Most of these are for STEM occupations.” The report also found that for “occupations with the most H-1B requests, recent wage growth has been much higher than the national average.” On average, in the 100 largest metropolitan areas in the United States, 46 percent of job openings requiring significant STEM knowledge go unfilled for one month or longer. In San Jose, California, for example, two-thirds of job vacancies that remain unfilled after one month, despite advertising the positions, are for STEM occupations. In many other metropolitan areas, that share remains close to half.⁴¹ Significantly, the American Enterprise Institute has found that

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each approved H-1B worker is associated with an additional 1.83 jobs among native-born American workers.⁴²

A 2013 report from Regional Economic Models, Inc. (REMI) explores the outcomes of an expansion of high-skilled (H-1B) and lesser-skilled (H-2A and H-2B) visas.⁴³ The report finds that overall economic effects of the policy changes would be positive, increasing gross domestic product (GDP) for the entire country and gross state product (GSP) for each state, as well as increasing net new jobs across industries. Specifically, employment and GSP is estimated to increase for all states and in all years as a result of an H-1B high-skilled program expansion. Nationwide, this would amount to 1.3 million jobs and a GDP increase of more than \$158 billion by 2045. An increase in H-2A agricultural visas would result in total employment increases of around 39,600 by 2045. Fully utilizing the H-2B seasonal worker visas up to the cap would increase total U.S. employment by around 24,000–25,000 over the next 30 years. The creation of a lesser-skilled, nonseasonal temporary worker program would lead to a total gain of about 365,000 jobs by 2045, and a rise in GDP of \$31 billion.

HIGH-TECH WORKERS

MYTH: There is no shortfall of native-born Americans for open positions in the natural sciences, engineering, and computer science and thus no need for foreign-born high-tech workers.

FACTS: Job openings are expanding at educational levels where demographic data show too few native-born students, so we can expect these shortfalls to persist in the future. Moreover, relative to other economic indicators, wages are increasing in STEM jobs requiring higher education.

Some claim that job creation in STEM fields cannot properly be viewed as outstripping the supply of qualified Americans since higher than desirable unemployment persists for American workers in some STEM occupations, and plenty of STEM grads work in non-STEM positions. Three critical facts belie this approach. First of all, this outlook ignores the fact that over 35 percent of STEM jobs are those that require less than a Bachelor's degree, while immigration reform efforts target, in particular, the approximately 20 percent of STEM jobs that require a Master's degree or higher. Secondly, job growth in positions requiring graduate level STEM training is exploding, far outpacing the American STEM training pipeline. Currently, the number of American students pursuing STEM fields is growing at less than one percent per year, and by 2018 there will be more than 230,000 advanced degree STEM jobs that will not be filled even if every new American STEM grad finds a job.⁴⁴ Thirdly, data shows that wages are increasing in STEM jobs requiring



higher education, with wage increases an accepted indicator that the number of qualified Americans is insufficient to fill jobs being created.

First, in assessing which job openings in STEM areas have sufficient numbers of qualified Americans and where there is a shortfall, it is important to be specific about what types of jobs, requiring what type of skills and education, employers are having difficulty filling with sufficient numbers of Americans. For example, in the computer science and mathematical occupations, more than 35 percent of jobs, and some of the STEM job growth, including many production manufacturing jobs, is in jobs that require less than a bachelor's degree. The job distribution in computer science and mathematical jobs is: 6.9 percent of jobs are filled by workers with high school diploma–level skills or less, 18.7 percent with skills based on some college, 10.5 percent with associate-level skills, 43.8 percent with bachelor-level skills, 17.7 percent with master-level skills, 0.8 percent professional degree–level skills, and 1.7 percent doctorate-level skills.⁴⁵

Furthermore, the Bureau of Labor Statistics has projected that 22 percent of new job openings through 2020 will require a master's degree or higher.⁴⁶ At the same time that one-fifth of new jobs will require individuals with graduate degrees, there are one-quarter more foreign-born graduate degree holders in the U.S. than native-born. In order to fill these job openings in our economy, employers will be faced with a situation where 10.6 percent of the foreign born in the U.S. age 25 to 34 have earned master's, professional, or doctoral degrees, while 8.5 percent of the native-born population of the same age have the same credentials.⁴⁷ Moreover, to the extent job

duties are best filled by individuals with STEM degrees, more than 40 percent of master's and doctoral degrees in STEM fields awarded by U.S. universities go the foreign born.⁴⁸ With respect to bachelor-level STEM degrees, a notable disparity is displayed among the native-born as compared to foreign-born degree holders. About 19 percent of the native-born pursue bachelor's degrees in STEM fields, while about 35 percent of the foreign born residing in the United States possess a STEM bachelor's, most often earned abroad.⁴⁹

Lastly, wages reflect the existence of a shortfall with regard to the supply of qualified professionals to fill STEM jobs requiring higher education. Engineer wages have risen by seven percent relative to all other occupations since 2003 and by three percent since 2008.⁵⁰ Longer-term trends suggest a similar point. For example, from 1999 to 2011, wages grew by 54 percent for computer and information research scientists, 38 percent for computer programmers, 40 percent for software applications engineers, 52 percent for systems software engineers, 31 percent for computer support specialists, and 47 percent for database administrators.⁵¹ Meaningfully, from 1999 to 2011, the consumer price index increased by 36 percent while the average wage for computer and mathematical occupations increased 44 percent.⁵²

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COMMUNITY IMPACT

MYTH: Immigrants hurt communities that are struggling economically.

FACT: Immigrants have economically revitalized many communities throughout the country.

In addition to boosting the national economy and strengthening America's global competitiveness, immigrants and immigrant entrepreneurs are important for metropolitan regional economies.⁵³ This is true not only in San Jose and Silicon Valley, but in many regions across the country. In Texas, San Antonio and Austin have built knowledge economies around the universities and research industries located there. Houston attracts high-skilled workers for the area's oil industry. In South Carolina, Greenville and Spartanburg have attracted industries that need high-skilled workers. In Boise, Idaho, knowledge-based employment has spurred the local economy and population growth. The universities and research organizations of the North Carolina piedmont, in Raleigh, Greensboro, and the Research Triangle area, create a high demand for high-skilled workers.

Long-term research shows that in addition to bringing more jobs and higher salaries to communities where they cluster, the impact of innovative industries has a profound multiplier effect on localities.⁵⁴ Jobs in the innovation economy generate a disproportionate number of local jobs in other industries. An analysis of 11 million American workers in 320 metropolitan areas shows that each new high-tech job in a metropolitan area creates five additional long-term local jobs outside of the high-tech sector.⁵⁵

Furthermore, the five new jobs created for each new high-tech job benefits a diverse group of workers: two new jobs for professional workers such as attorneys and doctors, and three new positions in nonprofessional occupations such as service industry jobs.⁵⁶ In many U.S. metropolitan areas, the innovation economy, and the high-skilled jobs related to it, drive prosperity for a broader base of workers living in the region.⁵⁷

Beyond the Silicon Valleys and Research Triangles of the United States, immigrants and immigrant entrepreneurs are making significant contributions to local economies and communities across America's heartland. In many places, the need for foreign talent is critical. For decades, large numbers of U.S. workers have been migrating from "Rustbelt" cities to the "Sunbelt." The cities and towns experiencing a decline in native-born populations must find ways to maintain a viable workforce. As a result, an increasing number of local communities are recognizing the need to be receptive to immigrants and are officially becoming places of welcome that encourage openness to immigration and support immigrant integration.

In Michigan, for example, while only six percent of the state's population is foreign-born, immigrants founded about one-third of the high-tech companies in the state over the past decade.⁵⁸ The state, through its "Welcoming Michigan" campaign of building immigrant-friendly communities, clearly sees the need to attract immigrants to the area.⁵⁹ Detroit also recognizes this need. In 2010, the city released the "Global Detroit" report, which documents a start-up rate for immigrant-founded high-tech firms in Michigan that is six times the rate for the native-born population.⁶⁰



Additionally, cities such as Dayton, Ohio⁶¹ have passed “welcoming resolutions”—formal proclamations by local elected leaders expressing their recognition of the importance of immigration to their local economy, and their openness to the continued contributions of immigrants.⁶² In Minnesota, local leaders also acknowledge the positive contributions of immigrants. As a member of the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce stated, “Immigrants aren’t just an asset because they numerically increase the workforce. They are also playing a key role as entrepreneurs in Minnesota and have transformed neighborhoods in both Minneapolis and St. Paul while helping revitalize downtowns in several regional centers around our state.”⁶³

TAXES

MYTH: Undocumented immigrants do not pay taxes.

FACT: Undocumented immigrants pay billions of dollars in taxes each year.

Undocumented immigrants pay sales taxes, just like every other consumer in the United States. Undocumented immigrants also pay property taxes—even if they rent housing. More than half of undocumented immigrants have federal and state income, Social Security, and Medicare taxes automatically deducted from their paychecks. However, undocumented immigrants working “on the books” are not eligible for any of the federal or state benefits that their tax dollars help to fund.⁶⁴ As a result, undocumented immigrants provide an enormous subsidy to the Social Security system in particular. Each year, Social Security taxes are

withheld from billions of dollars in wages earned by workers whose names and Social Security numbers do not match the records of the Social Security Administration (SSA). According to the SSA, undocumented immigrants paid \$13 billion in payroll taxes into the Social Security Trust Fund in 2010 alone.⁶⁵

Tax payments by undocumented immigrants and their families are also sizable at the state and local levels. The Institute for Taxation and Economic Policy (ITEP) estimates that households headed by undocumented immigrants paid \$10.6 billion in state and local taxes in 2010. That included \$1.2 billion in personal income taxes, \$1.2 billion in property taxes, and \$8.1 billion in sales taxes. The states receiving the most tax revenue from households headed by undocumented immigrants were California (\$2.2 billion), Texas (\$1.6 billion), New York (\$744.3 million), Florida (\$706.3 million), and Illinois (\$562.1 million).⁶⁶

Other studies have yielded similar findings. The Texas State Comptroller estimated that undocumented immigrants in Texas generate \$1.6 billion per year in state tax revenue.⁶⁷ In Georgia, the annual tax contributions of undocumented immigrants are estimated at \$215.6 million to \$252.5 million.⁶⁸ In Colorado, undocumented immigrants pay between \$159 million and \$194 million.⁶⁹ In Oregon, they pay between \$134 million and \$187 million—plus, employers in Oregon pay between \$97 million and \$136 million in taxes on behalf of undocumented workers.⁷⁰ In Iowa, undocumented immigrants pay \$40 million to \$62 million—and their employers contribute \$50 million to \$77.8 million on their behalf.⁷¹

The tax payments of now-undocumented

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immigrants would be significantly greater if they had legal status. According to ITEP, if undocumented immigrants were allowed to work legally in the United States, they would pay \$12.7 billion in state and local taxes—an increase of \$2.1 billion over what they pay now. This would amount to \$2.8 billion in income taxes (an increase of \$1.6 billion), \$1.3 billion in property taxes (an increase of \$76.1 million), and \$8.5 billion in sales taxes (an increase of \$420.5 million).⁷²

WELFARE

MYTH: Immigrants come to the United States for welfare benefits.

FACT: Undocumented immigrants are not eligible for federal public benefit programs, and even legal immigrants face stringent eligibility restrictions.

Undocumented immigrants are not eligible for federal public benefits such as Social Security, Supplemental Security Income, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Medicaid, Medicare, and food stamps. Even most legal immigrants cannot receive these benefits until they have been in the United States for five years or longer, regardless of how much they have worked or paid in taxes.⁷³ Given these restrictions, it is not surprising that U.S. citizens are more likely to receive public benefits than are noncitizens.⁷⁴

A number of state studies have demonstrated that, on average, immigrants pay more in taxes than they receive in government services and benefits. For instance, a study in Arizona found that the

state's immigrants generate \$2.4 billion in tax revenue per year, which more than offsets the \$1.4 billion worth of educational, healthcare, and law enforcement resources they utilize.⁷⁵ A study in Florida estimated that, on a per capita basis, immigrants in the state pay nearly \$1,500 more in taxes than they receive in public benefits.⁷⁶

Nonetheless, some studies have sought to demonstrate that households headed by immigrants make costly use of public-benefits programs. Invariably, most of the “costs” calculated by such studies are for programs utilized by the native-born, U.S.-citizen children of immigrants. These children are counted as a “cost” of immigration if they are under 18, but as part of the native-born population if they are working, taxpaying adults. Yet all people are “costly” as children who are still in school and have not yet entered the workforce. Economists view expenditures on healthcare and education for children as investments that pay off later, when those children become workers and taxpayers. Healthy, well-educated children are more productive, earn higher wages, and pay more in taxes as adults.⁷⁷



INTEGRATION

MYTH: Today's immigrants are not assimilating into U.S. society.

FACT: Today's immigrants are buying homes, becoming U.S. citizens, and learning English.

Throughout U.S. history, each new wave of immigrants has been accused of not “assimilating” into U.S. society. The Italian, Polish, and Eastern European immigrants who came here at the end of the nineteenth century faced this accusation, and subsequently proved it wrong as they and their children learned English, bought homes, got better jobs, became U.S. citizens, and integrated into their communities in many other ways. The Latin American and Asian immigrants who have come here more recently now face the same accusation. As with their predecessors, they are proving that accusation to be false and are integrating into U.S. society and climbing the socioeconomic ladder over time.⁷⁸

A study by demographer Dowell Myers demonstrates the integration and socioeconomic progress of immigrants over the course of two decades. Myers focuses on those immigrants who came to the United States between 1985 and 1989. He uses census data to take a socioeconomic snapshot of these long-term immigrants in 1990 and again in 2008—after they had lived in the United States for 18 years. The data indicate that, since coming here, a growing number of long-term immigrants have bought homes, earned higher wages, and become U.S. citizens. Between 1990 and 2008, the share of these immigrants who owned homes jumped from 16 percent to 62 percent. The share who earned incomes above

the “low-income” level rose from 35 percent to 66 percent. The share who were U.S. citizens grew from seven percent to 56 percent.⁷⁹

Likewise, data from the Office of Immigration Statistics at the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) reveal that the number of immigrants applying for U.S. citizenship has been growing for decades. A DHS report found that the average number of immigrants naturalizing each year increased from fewer than 120,000 during the 1950s and 1960s, to 210,000 during the 1980s, 500,000 during the 1990s, and 680,000 between 2000 and 2009. The number of naturalizations grew from 619,913 in 2010, to 694,193 in 2011, to 757,434 in 2012.⁸⁰ Moreover, immigrants today are naturalizing at a faster rate than in the past.⁸¹ According to a 2008 DHS report, “approximately one third of immigrants who obtained LPR [legal permanent resident] status from the mid-1970s through the mid-1980s naturalized within 10 years, whereas nearly half the immigrants who obtained status in the mid-to-late-1990s did so.”⁸²

The economic and social integration of immigrants is an ongoing process that will continue over the decades to come. In a 2011 report, Myers concludes that the share of immigrants who own homes is projected to increase from 25.5 percent in 2000 to 72 percent in 2030. The share that speak English “well” or “very well” is projected to grow from 57.5 percent to 70.3 percent over the same period. And the share living in poverty is projected to decrease from 22.8 percent to 13.4 percent.⁸³ In other words, immigrants are not settling into “ethnic enclaves” that exist apart from mainstream America. Rather, they are becoming progressively more “American” in every sense of the word.

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Integration and upward mobility are most apparent among the children of immigrants. For instance, according to surveys by the Pew Research Center, “adults in the second generation are doing better than those in the first generation in median household income (\$58,000 versus \$46,000); college degrees (36 percent versus 29 percent); and homeownership (64 percent versus 51 percent). They are less likely to be in poverty (11 percent versus 18 percent) and less likely to have not finished high school (10 percent versus 28 percent).”⁸⁴ A study by economist James P. Smith found that the wages and educational attainment of Latino men increase significantly from generation to generation, with wages increasing 15 percent from the first generation and in between the second and third generations, an additional 5.6 percent.⁸⁵

CRIME

MYTH: Immigrants are more likely to commit crimes than native-born Americans.

FACT: Immigration does not cause crime rates to rise, and immigrants are actually less likely to commit crimes or be behind bars than native-born Americans.

High levels of immigration are not associated with more crime. Between 1990 and 2010, the foreign-born share of the U.S. population grew from 7.9 percent to 12.9 percent⁸⁶ and the number of unauthorized immigrants tripled from 3.5 million to 11.2 million.⁸⁷ During the same period, FBI data indicates that the violent crime

rate declined 45 percent and the property crime rate fell 42 percent.⁸⁸ Likewise, a report from the conservative Americas Majority Foundation found that crime rates are lowest in states with the highest immigration growth rates. In 2006, the 10 states with the most pronounced, recent increases in immigration had the lowest rates of crime in general and violent crime in particular.⁸⁹

Moreover, immigrants are much less likely to be behind bars than native-born Americans. A study by sociologist Rubén Rumbaut found that, among young men, incarceration rates are lowest for immigrants. This holds true regardless of ethnicity or educational attainment, even for Mexicans, Salvadorans, and Guatemalans who comprise a majority of the undocumented population. In 2000, the incarceration rate for young immigrant men was only 0.7 percent—five times lower than the 3.5 percent incarceration rate among young native-born men.⁹⁰ A study by the Public Policy Institute of California yielded similar results. The study found that, in 2005, the incarceration rate for foreign-born adults in California was 297 per 100,000—compared to 813 per 100,000 for native-born adults. Moreover, immigrants made up 35 percent of California’s adult population, but only 17 percent of the state prison population.⁹¹

Similarly, economists Kristin Butcher and Anne Morrison Piehl used data from the 1980, 1990, and 2000 censuses to demonstrate that, during the 1990s, “those immigrants who chose to come to the United States were less likely to be involved in criminal activity than earlier immigrants and the native born.” The analysis by Butcher and Piehl established that the lower incarceration rate for immigrants could not be explained away with the argument that there are fewer immigrants in prison because so many of



them are deported. Nor could it be dismissed on the grounds that harsher immigration laws are deterring immigrants from committing crimes because they are afraid of getting deported.⁹²

These studies are only the most recent in a very long line of research demonstrating that immigrants are *less* likely than native-born Americans to commit crimes or to be incarcerated.⁹³

BORDER SECURITY

MYTH: Reforming the legal immigration system will not help secure the border.

FACT: Immigration reform is an integral part of any effective border security strategy.

Since 1986, after passage of the Immigration Reform and Control Act, the federal government has spent an estimated \$186.8 billion on immigration enforcement.⁹⁴ Yet during that time, the unauthorized population has tripled in size to 11 million.⁹⁵ This did not occur because \$186.6 billion was not enough to get the job done. It occurred because this money was spent trying to enforce immigration laws that have consistently failed to match either the U.S. economy's demand for workers or the natural desire of immigrants to be reunited with their families. Therefore, enforcement coupled with commonsense reforms to our legal immigration system is one of the most effective ways to enhance national security. Immigration reform that includes a pathway to legal status for undocumented immigrants

already living in the country, with the creation of flexible avenues for future immigration (through temporary worker programs), and mandatory employment verification, would enhance border security and reduce illegal immigration.

Broad immigration reform in the 113th Congress would enhance border security in multiple ways. To begin with, reform would reduce the flow of undocumented immigrants by providing a mechanism for them to legally come and work in the United States by creating more flexible legal limits on employment-based immigration. Workers admitted under employment-based visa programs would be screened against law enforcement databases prior to entering the country. Paired with a workable employment verification system, once their visas expire, these new temporary workers would be unable to work in the United States.

Further, an earned lawful status program for the undocumented would also have a comparable impact on national security as the undocumented come out of the shadows, register with the federal government, and undergo background checks. Additionally, an earned lawful status program for the undocumented would reduce the lucrative fraudulent document and smuggling industry that currently persists as well as “shrink the haystack,” allowing law enforcement to concentrate on removing individuals with criminal backgrounds rather than those entering the country legitimately to work.⁹⁶

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