



Federalism or a Circuitous Path to Unpopular Guest Worker Increases?

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The National Review has two items related to the horrible, no good, very bad guest worker + amnesty bill, introduced by Senator Ron Johnson (WI) last week.

(1) "The perils of immigration federalism," by Fred Bauer, who makes a general point about guest worker programs -- by nature, they discourage domestic workforce participation:

"Wages in many sectors have stagnated, workforce participation is down, and young people face ever-larger obstacles in trying to make it on their own. Reforming government programs so that they do not disincentivize employment could be part of addressing that problem, but so could tightening the labor market. Guest-worker programs weaken the viability of the average worker, and in so doing they damage the culture of work."

(2) "Establishment Republicans and the Serfdom Solution," by Peter Spiliakos, who sarcastically writes:

"Senator Ron Johnson has proposed a bill for 'state-based' guest workers: People would be brought into America not as prospective citizens but as temporary workers who are bound to the land. Who knew that the solution to America's persistent decline in labor-force participation among the prime-aged was to import people to work as serfs?"

"This is hot on the tail of the suggestion by Michigan's Republican governor Rick Snyder to have 50,000 additional visas for the Detroit area. That makes sense. Detroit has lost population, and guest workers are people. Obviously, Detroit would not have had its recent (as in the past 50 years) problems if America had a welcoming immigration policy."

Spiliakos says the whole thing is an example of politicians trying to fool the electorate into agreeing to the increases in immigration they say they oppose:

"Johnson and Snyder (and, one suspects, most elected Republican officeholders) just want a backdoor to increase immigration. They need to lie and obfuscate because they know that increasing immigration is opposed by between 85 and 79 percent of the American public."

Supporters of the bill, however, openly celebrate the increase. David Bier of the Cato Institute writes in *The Hill*:

"This bill would allow America to compete for foreign workers in the same way other countries already do. As my new Cato Institute analysis of the bill notes, the legislation's 500,000 visas would increase the annual flow of foreign workers to the United States by about 80 percent.

"In this context, it makes sense to increase legal immigration..."

The Johnson bill raises questions about the appropriate role for the states in determining immigration policy (more on that [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)), but the line that divides the cheerleaders from the hecklers is a familiar one. As usual, it is a question of numbers.

The U.S. issues more than 1 million permanent work permits and approximately one million more temporary work permits to foreign workers every year. Pundits and politicians who think the government should provide more foreign workers to U.S. employers probably like the Johnson bill. Pundits and politicians who would like to see more American workers (U.S.-born and foreign-born) filling those jobs - even if it means higher wages and prices - see it as unnecessary and harmful.