

THE DAILY CALLER

States should take the lead on immigration reform

By Matthew La Corte

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This week, the libertarian Cato Institute released a [report](#) that proposed a state-based visa program to expand lawful immigration in the U.S. The study comes on the heels of lots of [talk](#) about immigration reform, but few legislative prospects. Congress has been paralyzed by polarization, gridlock, and obstruction. With the midterm elections coming this fall, both parties are content with coasting on the status quo until November.

To these ends, enabling individual states to deal with immigration policy without the federal government will begin to fix the nation's inefficient immigration system. State governments are better positioned than bureaucrats in Washington to design systems that meet local economic demands for new immigrants.

With state-based visas, state and local governments would work with employers to tailor their jurisdiction's immigration strategy to meet economic demands. Under the plan, the federal government would waive federal control over visa decisions.

Michigan Governor Rick Snyder has come [out](#) in support of regionally based visa programs to inject new economic opportunities into cities like Detroit. Some states may choose not to issue any new state-based visas, and they have every right to do so. The point is that this regionalized decision allows for states to compete economically. If one state allows high levels of new immigration and sees soaring economic growth, it would incentivize other states to follow suit.

This decentralized reform allows each state to determine their immigration fate. Some geographically similar states, such as New Jersey, New York, and Connecticut, could form a partnership to allow local visa holders to look for employment within their three borders. Other state partnerships could form for agricultural seasons. For example, guest workers could farm in California during the spring and summer and then head to Washington for the fall season to assist with different crops.

Some question the economic benefits of immigration. However, the evidence overwhelmingly shows that immigrants are a benefit to the economy. Immigrants are 30 percent more likely to start a business than natives. Immigrants or second generation immigrants [founded](#) 40 percent of the Fortune 500 companies in the U.S. Immigrant college graduates are also more likely to file for a [patent](#) than similarly educated natives. Finally, immigrants help facilitate trade and investment links with their home countries. All of this benefits both regional areas, as well as the U.S. economy as a whole.

Some may fear implementing such a state-based system because of potential adverse effects or unintended consequences. But consider that Canada and Australia currently have regional immigration visas. The report notes the Canadian program accepted 38,000 new immigrants in 2011. An independent evaluation of the program found that it was “successful at regionalizing the benefits of immigration” and that there is a “continuing need” for the program. In Australia, the program accepted more than 15,000 immigrants, and 80 percent of employers rated the program an 8 or above out of 10, according to the Australian Department of Immigration and Border Protection.

Both Republicans and Democrats support legal immigration. State-based visas give states the opportunity to attract new residents and boost economic growth while increasing opportunities for legal immigration. This plan promotes labor supply flexibility as visa holders would be able to work for any employer in a given state. State-based visas would allow state governments to regulate the control and flow of immigration. An immigration system rooted in federalism is better suited to handle today’s complex immigration and economic issues, especially with an idle Congress.