



## Trowbridge: Undocumented immigrants deserve in-state tuition

By Ron Trowbridge

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Raging now is the heated issue of whether undocumented workers should be permitted in-state tuition. I boldly say, yes - for two reasons: One, educated immigrants pay back more to society than they take. Two, it is ethically right to grant such tuition.

Unfortunately, candidates in Republican primaries generally believe that they must oppose such in-state tuition for illegal immigrants if they are to survive in the primary. Theirs' becomes a sort of automatic Pavlovian response on the issue.

I think I was a Republican/conservative before birth. My bona fides have long been established: appointed by President [Ronald Reagan](#) to work in his administration; chief of staff to U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice Warren Burger; for 39 years, a good friend of [Bill Buckley](#); and on and on.

But I believe my conservative brethren are wrong on the issue of in-state tuition.

First, there is the economic argument: [Daniel Griswold](#), a former immigration expert at the [Cato Institute](#), wrote me: "In 1997, the [National Research Council](#) published a major study on immigration. It found that an immigrant with a college education is a huge net plus for the United States."

Griswold reports this finding of the research council's study: "Immigrants and their descendants represent a net fiscal gain for the United States. The typical immigrant and all his or her descendants represent a positive \$80,000 fiscal gain to the government. An immigrant with more than a high school education (plus descendants) represents a \$198,000 fiscal gain, one with a high school diploma a \$51,000 gain and one with less than a high school education, a \$13,000 loss."

It is also bizarre to argue that immigrants who live in a state and pay property and sales taxes there should be regarded as out-of-state.

Second, there is the ethical argument: A child born in the U.S. of illegal-immigrant parents is, as stated clearly in the 14th Amendment, an American citizen. Some naysayers in Arizona tried to reinterpret the 14th Amendment, but that failed. The debate is over.

Or take a child who came to this country with undocumented parents at the age of 3, 7, or 10, and who has really only known the U.S. as his or her home and country. The sins of the parents should not be visited upon innocent children. Such heaping is cruel.

Out-of-state tuition to these immigrants would be out of reach for nearly all. Using Texas A&M University as an example, in-state tuition there is \$5,296 per year; out-of-state tuition, \$25,126 per year - a yearly difference of \$19,830. The total difference for four years would be \$79,320.

The [Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board](#) reported in 2011 that Texas colleges and universities enrolled around 1.5 million students. The number of illegal immigrants enrolled in public four-year colleges and universities totaled some 4,000, while the number in community colleges totaled some 12,000. Sixteen thousand illegal immigrant students out of a total of 1.5 million students is hardly excessive. It's slightly more than 1 percent.

Nor will they preclude space for admission to other students. Many colleges advertise for more students.

For the first time in Texas history, more Hispanic students than white students took the SAT last year. Texas Class of 2013 SAT-takers represented 56 percent of high school graduates. Of those, 62 percent identified themselves as minorities, reports [the Associated Press](#).

In the [American Enterprise Institute's](#) study, "Cheap for Whom?," authors [Jorge Klor de Alva](#) and [Mark Schneider](#) conclude: "If the country is to retain its competitive edge, it must reverse the current policies that result in providing the lowest levels of taxpayer support to the institutions that enroll the highest percentage of low-income, nontraditional and minority students - the fastest-growing segments of the population." This should include the relatively small total number of illegal immigrants who attend four- and two-year public schools in Texas.

Ronald Reagan once said, "Don't be afraid to see what you see." Gov. [Rick Perry](#) has his eyes open and has seen the light on immigrants. But on the issue of in-state tuition for illegal immigrants in Republican primaries, it is politically safer for candidates to remain blind.

It is disheartening for me to see Republican candidates falling all over themselves to see who can be the most hostile toward illegal immigrants in an effort to gain the conservative vote. That is not only cruel, it is bad politics.

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