



## Senator Sessions Is Right on Immigration

**Increasing immigration hurts the economy.**

April 16, 2015

Writing last week in the *Washington Post*, Senator Jeff Sessions (R., Ala.) suggested: “It is time for an honest discussion of immigration.” This week, the *New York Times* editorial board proved him right.

Relying on a rebuttal from the libertarian Cato Institute, the *Times* contends that Senator Sessions’s interest in slowing the pace of legal immigration stems from a dedicated disregard for the overwhelming economic evidence supporting high levels of legal immigration — but, more important, ultimately from the fact that he “never wanted the immigrants here in the first place.”

The economic evidence for the benefits of high levels of legal immigration is in fact mixed, and it is not obvious that immigration boosts average incomes of native-born workers by any significant amount. Furthermore, to the extent that immigration raises the average income of native-born Americans, it does so by lowering prices as a result of downward pressure on wages, mainly in low-wage, low-skill industries, which employ disproportionately previous immigrants and Hispanics. The Cato Institute analysis, while reading the literature on the effects of immigration on low-skilled native-born workers in the most optimistic possible way, concedes that low-skilled immigrants who are already here will suffer from higher levels of immigration in the future. And when 13 percent of Americans, and 16 percent of the workforce, is foreign-born, that makes for a significant, widespread negative impact — and one that affects everyone else, through its effects on our welfare state, our politics, and our society.

Since the *Times*’ editors spend a sizeable chunk of the editorial bemoaning income inequality and criticizing Republicans’ “obdurate hostility to policies that help the poor and working class,” this should give them pause. (The *Times*, by the way, didn’t always think that it was out of bounds to note the economic downside of immigration. It editorialized in 2000: “Between about 1980 and 1995, the gap between the wages of high school dropouts and all other workers widened substantially. Prof. George Borjas of Harvard estimates that almost half of this trend can be traced to immigration of unskilled workers.”)

The *Times*’ claim that high levels of legal immigration will not affect, or will reduce, unemployment also strains common sense. Evaluating the effects of the Gang of Eight immigration bill being debated in early 2014, the Congressional Budget Office predicted a temporary rise in unemployment should it pass. That should be obvious. There is no reason to

believe that the number of jobs will necessarily expand at the same rate as immigration, or that the skills of immigrants and the skills required for available jobs will necessarily correspond.

Finally, the Times conveniently ignores the myriad non-economic aspects of immigration. What are the effects of continued mass immigration on, say, cultural assimilation and community stability? The editors of the Times have no answer, preferring simply to wish away such problems and posit that only bigots and xenophobes think about them.

The Times ultimately resorts to ugly ad hominem attacks against Senator Sessions. Which serves only to show how important Senator Sessions's call for an honest and frank discussion really is.