

NEW REPUBLIC

How Much Would It Cost to Deport All Undocumented Immigrants?

Way, way more than anyone is willing to pay

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Republicans are very clear about what they want President Barack Obama to do with the undocumented children pouring into the United States across the Mexican border: Deport them. That isn't a newfound GOP position. It's also their de facto policy toward all undocumented immigrants in the country. Such a policy would carry real costs. In fact, the White House requested \$3.7 billion Tuesday to hire more border control agents, build new detention facilities, and transfer immigration judges to the South. But a mass deportation program would cost magnitudes more. Are Republicans willing to fund it?

In 2010, researchers at the Center for American Progress (CAP) calculated the total costs of such a program by breaking down the deportation process into four parts: Apprehension, detention, legal proceedings and transportation. Using data from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), CAP estimated the cost of each part of that process per undocumented immigrant. For instance, for the 2008 fiscal year, each apprehension cost \$18,310. For 30 days of detention, the cost was \$3,335. The researchers also assumed that 20 percent of undocumented immigrants would voluntarily leave under a mass deportations program. That would leave DHS to find and deport the remaining 80 percent.

After running the numbers, CAP estimated the cost for deporting 10.8 million undocumented immigrants in America would be \$200 billion over five years. DHS would also need \$17 billion each year thereafter for continued enforcement. But there are more undocumented immigrants currently in the United States than when CAP produced its report. The DHS's most recent report, from January 2012, estimates there are 11.5 million undocumented immigrants living in the United States. Adjusting for that increases the costs to \$216 billion.

Yet even that understates the cost, because those numbers are not adjusted for inflation. Doing so brings the five-year cost of a mass deportations program to \$239 billion, before factoring in the money for sustained enforcement to ensure a new wave of undocumented immigrants does not enter the United States. To put that in perspective, the federal government spent \$265 billion on Medicaid in 2013. The Department of Homeland Security's annual budget is only around \$60 billion. A mass deportations program would require a massive increase in funding.

There are other monetary costs and savings associated with such an immigration policy as well. Many undocumented immigrants pay taxes, use government services and collect benefits. Most importantly, undocumented immigrants contribute to the economy. Labor economists agree that there are net gains to having a larger labor supply. Some groups benefit more than others do—and some may even be hurt by the millions of undocumented immigrants. In 2012, researchers at the Cato Institute estimated that a mass deportations policy would reduce economic growth by around \$250 billion per year. Those costs would not be evenly distributed: Those at the very bottom of the income distribution, particularly those without a high school diploma, may even earn higher wages in the absence of undocumented immigrants. But in total, undocumented immigrants benefit the economy.

Of course, mass deportations are not a current policy option. But as the *Washington Post*'s Greg Sargent has documented, there is nothing blocking House GOP leaders from holding a vote on their preferred version of immigration reform. Unlike the Senate, there are no concerns about a filibuster in the House. But immigration reform is off the table for the foreseeable future, meaning that the Republican position is effectively one of the deportations. If they knew the huge economic and monetary costs required for such a program, maybe they would rethink that position.