



Immigration Reform 2013: 5 Common Myths, Debunked

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Between the government shutdown and the upcoming debt ceiling debate, it is sometimes hard to remember that a few months ago, the United States' Senate passed a bipartisan comprehensive immigration reform bill — a rare feat in the current political climate. However, despite representatives from both parties promising action on immigration reform, the House of Representatives has yet to bring anything resembling a reform package to the floor, neither piecemeal nor comprehensive.

Proponents are not taking this inaction lying down, and have been mobilizing citizens across the country to press their representatives to act. While it is great to see so many Americans enthusiastic about updating and reforming a very broken system, the fact is that myths surrounding both legal and undocumented immigrants continuously bring the debate over reforms to stereotypical — and frankly illogical — extremes. In order to break the stereotypes associated with immigrants and immigration reform as a whole, here are five myths perpetuated by opponents of reform.

1. They Take Our Jobs

Certainly the most common and also erroneous myth about immigrants is that they negatively affect the employment of native-born Americans. Instead, studies by experts at the American Enterprise Institute suggest that immigrants have no effect on native jobs. A study from the Center for American Progress (CAP) actually shows a positive correlation between higher levels of immigrants and job growth. The CAP study also encourages legalization and the granting of citizenship to undocumented immigrants, which in their estimates could result in over 150,000 jobs per year. It is certainly easy to blame immigrants for jobless Americans, but all studies show that immigrants do not take slices from the pie; they in fact make it bigger.

2. All They Do is Use Welfare Benefits

While it is certainly true that some immigrants come to this nation and fall unemployed, saying that they abuse our welfare system is false. A study by the right leaning CATO institute states that immigrants and their descendants “pay more in taxes than they consume in government services in terms of net present value.” While certainly true that low skilled immigrants often take advantage of government benefits, the benefits brought by immigrants to the national economy more than make up for any government benefits. Immigrants (both legal and illegal) also show an incredible desire to participate in the workforce.

3. They Won't Learn English

While immigrants coming to the U.S. are not typically fluent English speakers, polls show that proficiency in English increases with time in the U.S. After 15 years, 75% of first generation immigrants speak English proficiently. Proficiency also dramatically increases with succeeding generations. It is reported that 91% and 97% of second and third generation immigrant families respectively speak English. While learning English is not necessarily an immediate reality for immigrants, it certainly becomes second nature as immigrant families adjust to new surroundings.

4. Our Borders Are Not Secure Enough

Our “unsecure border” problem is definitely a popular talking point for immigration reform on both sides. While reforms to immigration control in the improvement of E-Verify systems and immigration detention policies are not a bad thing, the U.S. has already spent more than enough on border agents and security at the border. Since 2000, the budget for border control has more than tripled and the amount of border patrol agents has more than doubled. All the while, the number of persons trying to enter the country illegally has reduced by more than 80%. It is time for our nation to approach enforcing immigration policy through a more modern lens.

5. Immigrants Are Predominantly Uneducated

This is another stereotype unfairly attributed to immigrants as a whole (specifically Hispanic immigrants). Studies actually show that a majority of undocumented immigrants have a high school degree or more. Additionally, of the estimated 11 million illegal immigrants, 40% remained in the country after overstaying their visas. A large amount of those who overstay visas are H-1B visa recipients, that are highly skilled and well educated. On top of illegal immigrants, a large amount of visa recipients are in F-1 and H-1B categories, which are made up of highly educated foreigners as well as foreign students. While reforms should certainly be made to prevent overstaying visas, immigrants (both legal and illegal) have shown to be at least somewhat educated.