



## At House Hearing, Cato Calls for Unlimited Immigration

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April 30, 2021

The House Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship held a hearing this week entitled, “Why Don’t They Just Get in Line? Barriers to Legal Immigration”. The Democratic members and the three witnesses they invited used the hearing to suggest that (1) there are not enough avenues for legal immigration; and (2) we are not admitting enough legal immigrants. I was the lone witness invited by the GOP and testified about how the high levels of legal immigration, both permanent and temporary, harm American workers.

One of the more remarkable takeaways from the hearing was the testimony of the Cato Institute’s David Bier, who repeatedly claimed that immigration does not negatively impact the wages and job opportunities for Americans and called for *unlimited* legal immigration. Here are a few examples:

*No, [immigrants] absolutely do not hurt Americans.*

This, of course, is demonstrably false. Pew found that the real wages of non-college-educated Americans have stagnated or declined over the last 40 years. It took a decade for the wages of hourly workers to return to pre-Great Recession levels.

*Today we have more open jobs in this country than before the start of the pandemic. So, yes, unemployment is high, but guess what, we’re still in the middle of the pandemic. Many people are still afraid to go out to work. But immigrants are willing to go out and work these jobs and we should let them. Because it’s harmful to our economy not to allow it.*

As of mid-March, there were 19 million Americans collecting unemployment. Cato apparently believes all of these people are too scared to work.

*Ultimately, Congress does need to address the fact that there are not enough green cards for the demand from around the world, and we need these people. And ultimately we need to create a flexible immigration system that evolves with our economy and society. So the idea that we should have a hard cap on the number of employment-based green cards makes no sense in a modern economy where demand could change overnight. A new industry could be born tomorrow and we don’t even know what it is. And yet we’re deciding in Congress right now how many green cards*

*we're going to have 10 years from now? ... So I would argue that we need a flexible cap or **have the cap eliminated entirely**, because every single person we're keeping out would be a huge asset to our economy right now. [Emphasis added.]*

The United States admits a million new lawful permanent residents and 700,000 temporary foreign workers per year. Since the 1965 Immigration Act, which established the general framework for our legal immigration system, 43 million aliens have obtained green cards. As mentioned above, wages of non-college-educated workers have stagnated over the period of time that aligns with the 1965 Act. Millions of Americans are still out of work. Cato's solution? More immigration!

Cato's position is also at odds with the results of its own polling from just this week. When asked, "Generally speaking, how much immigration do you think would be good for the country?" 68 percent said low levels and 9 percent said no immigration. Just 23 percent said high levels of immigration. While one could argue whether or not a million new immigrants a year is "low" or "high", this polling clearly does not support unlimited immigration as promoted by Bier.

*The main concern I'm hearing from the other side is that there are just too many people who want to come to this country. I don't share that concern at all. I think more people contributing to this country would make us a stronger economy, a stronger country. If you look at our share of GDP, it's declined by 50 percent out of the share of world GDP over the last 50 years. So the U.S. influence is declining as a result of these limits on immigration.*

Here, Cato commits a common logic fallacy. Of course, immigration makes the economy grow. You are literally adding more people, so of course gross domestic product increases. That misses the point. The relevant question is, how do Americans already here fare? And what we see is that immigrant competition results in a wealth transfer from American workers to employers. And if U.S. influence around the world is in decline, as claimed, that is for reasons that have nothing to do with our legal immigration policies.

*The Social Security Administration is telling us, we need workers to fund Social Security.*

The notion that our Social Security system needs to be propped up by adding immigrant workers, instead of reforming it, is a common refrain for advocates of unlimited immigration. Besides being untrue, what makes Bier's claim so befuddling is that the very Cato Institute that employs him opposes Social Security!