



Republicans Worried About the Social Security Deficit Should Support Immigration

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As Republicans and Democrats spar over the nation's southern border as well as entitlements like Social Security and Medicare, they might be happy to learn that the former is actually the answer to saving the latter. Congress must pass an immigration reform policy that encourages legal migration and is equipped with a system of thorough vetting—not in addition to saving Social Security and Medicare, but as the only way to truly do so.

Donald Trump once said the nation was "full" as a way to dissuade migrants from seeking entry into the United States. However, as the *New York Times* has pointed out, demographers and economists alike disagree. Our country's population is aging, and birth rates are declining. Republicans know this. Vermont's Republican Governor once admitted that the state's "declining labor force" is the "root of every problem we face" and characterized it as the "biggest threat" to a prosperous future. The number of "prime working age adults" declined in 80 percent of counties nationwide between 2007-2017.

Our nation's major cities are suffering from a declining tax base due to white flight and suburbanization, but also because of overall population shrinkage. Major industrial centers like Cleveland, Detroit, Pittsburgh, Buffalo and St. Louis have all lost more than half of their populations since their peak in the 1950s. The result of a smaller population is less business investment, more school closures, and of course, difficulty maintaining entitlement programs.

There's an easy solution to this problem. Millionaire right wing cable news hosts like to scare their aging working- and middle- class viewers on immigration, but immigrants are the key to securing the social benefits American workers earned by working hard.

We need the labor. Currently, life expectancy is higher than in past generations, even taking into account the million COVID-19 deaths. Meanwhile, birth rates are significantly lower. How to fill that gap? It turns out, immigrants, regardless of legal status, are actually already keeping Social

Security and Medicare afloat, supporting the Social Security system and Medicare through payroll taxes.

While immigrants use entitlements as well, they use far fewer than native born Americans. The libertarian Cato Institute found that adult immigrants are 47 percent less likely to receive Social Security benefits than the native born. Moreover, the average amount they received was \$1,427 less than native born Americans in 2016. Bill Clinton's 1996 Welfare Reform Law also barred immigrants with fewer than five years of legal residency from receiving Medicaid.

Republicans who complain about Social Security are correct that it is running on a deficit. The only way to fix this is to allow for more legal immigration. Immigrants are usually working age and on average, have more children than native born American citizens.

Now is the best time to fix and encourage immigration. We are presently experiencing a labor shortage. Federal reserve Chairman Jerome Powell has said that there are 3.5 million people "missing" from the labor force. Rural farmers are struggling to find American workers.

While there is concern that Black workers will fare worse if there is more immigration, currently, unemployment for Black workers is near historic lows. And African Americans will disproportionately benefit if Social Security is strong and solvent. According to the NAACP, 58 percent of unmarried African American elderly people received 90 percent or more of their income from Social Security.

Other solutions have been suggested, like raising the eligibility age for Social Security. Yet these will ultimately be unfair to Black people. Black people have a significantly lower life expectancy. In other words, they will pay into a system that they will not reap benefits from.

While the Right tries to indoctrinate their followers with racist and nonsensical "Great Replacement" theories that portray immigrants as a threat to their national and economic interests, the Left should promote immigration with strong vetting as the Great Protection theory.