



Immigration advocates slam pending Heritage cost estimate

By: Neil Munro – April 5, 2013

Advocates for mass immigration are preemptively slamming an unreleased study by the Heritage Foundation that is expected to highlight the massive long-term cost of the Senate's draft immigration and guest-worker bill.

A similar Heritage report helped spur the public protests that sank the 2007 reform bill, say advocates of the pending immigration rewrite.

"It had quite a big effect on the debate at the time," said Alex Nowrasteh, the immigration advocate at the libertarian Cato Institute. "The indications are that they're going to release a study similar to that ... and I want to get a headstart" in countering it, he told The Daily Caller.

Officials at the Center for American Progress are also dumping on the report prior to its release.

The Heritage report will likely exclude the taxes paid by immigrants, complained Adriana Kugler, a professor at the Georgetown Public Policy Institute. "That's very troublesome," she said at a March event held by CAP.

In 2007, Heritage report helped derail the 2007 push for large-scale immigration by giving the public an easy-to-understand \$2.6 trillion estimate of the bill's likely long-term costs.

The foundation reported the 2007 legislation would annually cost Americans \$17,000 in retirement funds for every unskilled immigrant given amnesty. The total cost for the bill would reach \$2.6 trillion, it estimated, largely because unskilled workers consume far more during retirement than they generate in taxes.

A Heritage staffer told TheDC that the group's demographic expert, Robert Rector, is completing the 2013 report.

Heritage's new head, former Sen. Jim DeMint, is expected to use Rector's report to campaign against the pending immigration bill.

"The comment of Heritage always matter when it comes to policy debates," Nowrasteh said.

Heritage's open opposition to the bill will mark a clear breach between Heritage's alliance of establishment and tea party conservatives, and pro-immigration alliance of business executives and business-backed GOP politicians.

Those politicians include South Carolina's Sen. Lindsey Graham, Sen. John McCain and Sen. Jeff Flake.

Heritage's opposition will also increase the political pressure on Sen. Marco Rubio, who is widely expected to use his role in writing the bill to help position himself for the 2016 presidential election.

He is using the immigration bill to boost his support among the media and business donors, and among non-political swing voters. But he is also trying to preserve his prior support among GOP conservatives.

Rector's 2007 report included many unjustified claims that should be discarded in 2013, claimed Nowrasteh.

For example, Rector exaggerated welfare costs by ignoring evidence that immigrant workers earn 15 percent more after they become legal, he told TheDC.

Also, some immigrant workers choose not to use welfare programs, other welfare payments may be scaled back after the bill is passed, and many immigrant workers may not get enrolled in Obamacare, he said.

Kugler dismissed Rector's analysis as a "a silly study." Rector discounted taxes paid by immigrants and also predicted an "outlandish" influx of 103 million immigrants over 20 years, she claimed.

"We can't make accurate estimates about future policies. ... We need to take a look at the specifics of this legislation when it comes out," Nowrasteh told TheDC.

However, "the Obamacare angle is still a problem," he acknowledged.

If senators exclude new immigrants from Obamacare, "that would change [costs] very dramatically," he said.

However, any exclusion of immigrants from Obamacare would give Democrats an issue to spur Latino turnout during 2014 and subsequent elections.

So far, the huge immigration bill is being drafted in secret.

Top Democrats, including President Obama's press secretary, have said it should be given a rapid path through the Senate Judiciary Committee and the Senate floor.

A rapid process may allow the bill to escape public censure, say advocates.

But the 2013 estimate may be far costlier, because the number of unemployed unskilled American and immigrant workers has risen amid the recession and companies' use of labor-saving automation.

Also, costs per immigrant will be much higher because of larger welfare payments, including the Obamacare law.

In January, the Internal Revenue Service estimated the cheapest Obamacare service will cost taxpayers \$20,000 per year for each low-income family of two adults and three kids.

In 1986, after the first amnesty, the number of immigrants' families jumped, partly because many former illegal immigrants choose to marry Americans or other immigrants and to have children. Simultaneously, there was a reduction in the number of kids born to middle-class Americans, partly because family income fell amid higher taxes and stalled wages.

If the pending amnesty and guest-work bill yields only four million new low-income families, the annual cost for Obamacare alone would be \$80 billion per year.

If that combined cost continues over 20 years, the extra Obamacare cost would reach \$1.6 trillion, further exacerbating the nation's growing budget crisis.

The cost would also rise further when amnestied illegals and guest-workers use other education, and welfare programs, and eventually use the family unification rules to win green-cards for their spouses, siblings and children.

In 2006, Rector estimated an amnesty for 12 million illegal immigrants would eventually increase the population by 66 million over 20 years via the reunification rules.

The 2013 bill may increase the U.S. population much faster.

That's because media reports and advocates' statements say the bill will authorize an annual inflow of roughly 400,000 long-term workers who would be eligible to apply for citizenship and family reunification.

However, some media reports say the new bill will limit family reunification to spouse and children, and will exclude siblings and parents.