



Is Team Rubio working to preemptively undermine a Heritage Foundation report?

By: Matt K. Lewis – April 9, 2013

Sen. Marco Rubio's chief of staff Cesar Conda went on a Twitter spree this morning, insisting that the best way to evaluate immigration reform is through "dynamic scoring," and noting that some "ignore [Jack] Kemp's teachings" when they cling to static scoring.

In other words, Conda is arguing we shouldn't just look at the *costs* associated with immigration reform, but also factor in ex ante *benefits*.

Rubio spokesman Alex Conant explained it this way: "This legislation will create millions of new taxpayers, allow companies to continue to grow in the US, and make it easier for entrepreneurs and job-creators to immigrate to the U.S." Team Rubio obviously believes budget scoring should reflect these changes.

Conda's tweets are a pretty clear signal that Team Rubio is joining with other conservatives who are aggressively attempting to preemptively undermine a soon-to-be-released Heritage Foundation study, which they fear could turn wavering conservatives against immigration reform.

As Politico recently reported, "The Heritage Foundation, an influential conservative think tank headed by former Sen. Jim DeMint (R-S.C.), plans to soon release cost estimates, arguing that federal benefits eventually given to millions of additional green card holders and citizens would worsen the country's already dire fiscal situation."

In a post earlier this week, the Cato Institute's Alex Nowrasteh called Heritage's 2007 study, "fatally flawed," adding: "Heritage's report relies on static scoring rather than dynamic scoring, making the same mistake in evaluating the impact of increased immigration on welfare costs that the Joint Committee on Taxation makes when scoring the impact of tax cuts."

The 2007 paper was widely viewed as having been the final nail in the coffin for immigration reform. And the fear is that Heritage is so respected — and is so viewed as *the* leader in the center-right policy debate in America — that history might repeat itself. (Remember, former Sen. Jim DeMint, who now heads Heritage, teamed with then-Sen. Barack Obama to help kill immigration reform in 2007, by embracing then-Sen. Byron Dorgan's poison pill.)

And so, a coalition of sorts seems to have formed to preempt the Heritage study from once again derailing reform. Conda and Cato are joined by Americans for Tax Reform (ATR) and economist Douglas Holtz-Eakin in calling for immigration reform to be judged based on dynamic scoring. In a memo circulated on the Hill, ATR's Joshua Culling warned that Robert Rector, who authored the Heritage report, "appears poised to make the same errors as the paper's latest iteration."

This, of course, sets up a battle on the right. Internecine fights are almost always interesting, but this one also serves as a prime example of how conservatives are still engaged in some serious soul-searching over some pretty significant policy differences.

Might DeMint once again play a key role in undermining immigration reform? If that happens, it would be both expected and ironic, inasmuch as it would also derail the primary legislation associated with DeMint protegee, Sen. Marco Rubio.

And to think, just a couple months ago, Rubio told GQ that DeMint was his best friend.