



## Conservatives battle over economic impact of immigration bill, as Senate votes to approve plan

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As a key Senate panel voted Tuesday to approve major immigration overhaul, conservatives continue to battle over which would be more damaging to the country's economy and budget -- passing the legislation or scrapping it and risking the possibility of doing nothing at all.

The debate re-ignited following the release of a recent study by the conservative Heritage Foundation that concluded the long-term cost of providing a path to citizenship for the country's roughly 11 million illegal immigrants would be \$6.3 trillion.

"At a time when our nation's major entitlements are already nearing bankruptcy, we cannot afford to add another \$6.3 trillion," Alabama Sen. Jeff Sessions, a major critic of the bipartisan Senate bill, said following the release of the May 6 study.

But other conservatives note there's a cost to inaction as well. The Heritage study itself found illegal immigrant households use about \$55 billion more in government services than they pay in taxes each year. Educating their children in public schools typically accounts for at least half of all costs, according to other studies, with health care and law enforcement usually following and states shouldering much of the financial burden.

In addition, the entire process of deporting an illegal immigrant -- from apprehension to detention to legal expenses -- is roughly \$12,500, according to Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

Passing tougher laws, and enforcing immigration laws on the books, is one way to cut down on the cost of services like education -- and is a solution advocated by more conservative members of Congress. But others see potential for more tax revenue from the millions "in the shadows," and are taking the gamble that doing something is better than the alternative.

"What's the alternative, the status quo, to leave in place something that is broken?" Florida Sen. Marco Rubio, a leading Senate Republican working on the legislation, said last week in a cable news interview.

Supporters of the so-called "Gang of Eight" plan argue the bill would in fact improve the economy and that lawmakers have a political and moral imperative to bring immigrants living in the United States illegally "out of shadows."

Alex Nowrasteh, a policy analyst for the libertarian-leaning Cato Institute, argued the Heritage study is a “massive underestimation of the economic benefits of immigration” that “refuses to consider” the growth in gross domestic product and other economic gains that the bill could bring.

He cites a 2012 paper by a University of California Los Angeles professor written for Cato that concluded immigration reform in the 10 years after enactment would increase the country’s GDP by \$1.5 trillion.

“It’s not the first time that I’ve questioned the free-market credentials of my friends at Heritage lately, and that’s making me sad,” Nowrasteh writes. “I criticized an earlier version of this report in 2007, arguing that their methodology was so flawed that one cannot take their report’s conclusions seriously. Unfortunately, their updated version differs little from their earlier one.”

Others are not convinced the economic benefits of mass legalization will materialize. The Heritage study said the annual cost will be \$106 billion in about 10 years, once illegal immigrants clear all their hurdles to get permanent legal status.

Steve Camarato, the research director at the Center for Immigration Studies, agreed with the Heritage findings and told FoxNews.com that an influx of under-educated people into the U.S. economy will have an “enormous” fiscal consequence.

“As a group, the less educated use more in services than they pay in taxes,” he said. “Anyone who argues otherwise is either lying or grossly uninformed.”

Meanwhile, many Democrats and Republicans would like to take credit for fixing the country’s illegal immigration system -- considering roughly 71 percent of Hispanics voted for President

Obama in 2012 and are now the country’s largest minority voting bloc.

“It’s the right thing to do,” Obama said on Univision a couple a weeks ago. “It’s the smart thing to do.”