



Nowrasteh on Guest Workers

David Henderson February 5, 2013

That is why a robust guest-worker program is needed: to accommodate future flows of migrants. After decades of unauthorized immigration motivated by economic gain, it is fantasy to expect it to stop after legalizing those unauthorized immigrants already here. Let us not forget that President Ronald Reagan tried an amnesty in 1986 - which failed because it legalized the workers here but did not provide a viable pathway for future workers to come.

What we need is a legal way for lower-skilled immigrants to enter the United States -- and a guest-worker visa program is the easiest avenue.

So why doesn't the proposed immigration reform include a comprehensive guest-worker program? Surprisingly, the main issue is not opposition from conservative Republicans. It is unions and their supporters who do not want it.

In the 2007 immigration reform push, an amendment that would have ended the guest-worker program after five years destroyed Republican support.

The then-leaders of the AFL-CIO, the Laborers' International Union of North America, the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union, the International Brotherhood of Boilermakers, the Iron Ship Builders, Blacksmiths, Forgers and Helpers and the Teamsters all wrote letters opposing guest workers and supporting the amendment.

This is from a short op/ed by Alex Nowrasteh. It's "Immigration plan does only half the job," Reuters, January 29, 2013. His whole piece is worth reading.

What caught my eye is the middle paragraph in the quote above. Like many people, I had bought the idea that the Republicans were the problem in preventing progress on immigration. But as this piece shows, one of the main problems was opposition by labor unions.