



# Right-Wing Media Figures Seize On Immigration Reform To Link Immigrants With Welfare

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Right-wing media figures have responded to immigration reform by invoking the oft-repeated conservative argument that legalizing immigrants will enlarge the "welfare state." In fact, the announced immigration reform proposal would prevent newly legalized immigrants from receiving federal benefits for an extended period of time; moreover, immigrants in general are less likely to receive welfare benefits.

Conservative Media Figures Respond To Immigration Framework By Invoking Welfare

Fox News' Bill O'Reilly Claimed That Immigration Reform Would Mean More Immigrants On The "Welfare Entitlement Train." On his Fox News show, Bill O'Reilly claimed that immigration reform would mean more immigrants "on the welfare entitlement train." He went on to say: "I think we need immigration reform. But I do think that they have to deal with the welfare situation. Because if you're going to add another 6 million people, and, believe me, when welfare gets -- when welfare, when immigration reform gets passed, that means the people that are in the other countries are going to be able to come here." [Fox News, The O'Reilly Factor, 1/28/13]

WSJ's Stephen Moore Speculated That Newly Legalized Immigrants Would Become "Welfare Recipients." On Fox News' America's Newsroom, guest and Wall Street Journal editorial board member Stephen Moore claimed that the "big concern" regarding immigration reform would be how many newly legalized immigrants would become eligible to receive public benefits. Though Moore stressed that he is pro-immigration, he stated: "I do have a concern about offering this safety net, food stamps, health care benefits, welfare benefits to immigrants who come here." He added: "We want immigrants who want to come here and work and be productive citizens, not people -- we don't want our welfare system to become a magnet." He also stated:

MOORE: You know, we've had a policy in this country for 100 years, Bill, that says immigrants can come to this country but they have to, when they, upon entry they have to prove to the satisfaction of the immigration officials that they will not become what is called a public charge, that is to say they won't become welfare recipients, that they will be productive citizens. And it will be interesting whether we extend that kind of qualification to the people who get legalized under this program. [Fox News, America's Newsroom, 1/28/13]

Michelle Malkin Advanced Notion That Immigration Proposal Would "Rope More Immigrants Into Welfare State." In a post on her blog titled, "While GOP leaders push amnesty, Dems rope more immigrants into welfare state," Fox News contributor Michelle Malkin asked, "How, pray tell, do these capitulationist Republicans propose to ensure that shamnesty beneficiares don't get access to federal benefits?":

Among the many self-deluded promises that GOP illegal alien amnesty promoters are making, this one is especially snort-worthy:

Those who have obtained probationary legal status would not be allowed to access federal benefits.

Oh, yeah? How, pray tell, do these capitulationist Republicans propose to ensure that shamnesty beneficiaries don't get access to federal benefits later when they can't do anything to prevent the Obama administration from sabotaging existing federal prohibitions on welfare for immigrants now? [MichelleMalkin.com, 1/28/13]

**FACT: Immigration Reform Proposal Restricts Newly Legalized Immigrants' Access To Social Benefits**

**KABC: Undocumented Immigrants Who Gain Legal Status Would "Not Receive Federal Benefits Like Welfare Or Medicaid."** ABC's Los Angeles affiliate, KABC, reported that undocumented immigrants who "gain legal status to live and work in the U.S." would "not receive federal benefits like welfare or Medicaid":

The process of obtaining citizenship won't be easy or short. Under the plan, undocumented immigrants would be required to register with the federal government. Those without a criminal record would be eligible for "probationary legal status" if they pass a background check and pay fines and back taxes. They would then gain legal status to live and work in the U.S., but not receive federal benefits like welfare or Medicaid. [KABC-TV, 1/28/13]

**Under Senate Framework, Current Benefit Restrictions For Non-Immigrants Will Remain In Place For Those Given Probationary Status.** The bipartisan framework for immigration reform recently announced by a group of eight senators states: "Current restrictions preventing non-immigrants from accessing federal public benefits will also apply to lawful probationary immigrants." [The Washington Post, accessed 1/28/13]

**Even Sen. Marco Rubio Has Noted That Immigrants With Temporary Status "Will Not Be Able To Receive Welfare, Student Aid Or Any Other Federal Public Assistance."** In an op-ed detailing what "we need to address" in immigration reform, Senator Marco Rubio (R-FL) said that those who have come here illegally and who haven't committed felonies will have "the opportunity to apply for temporary non-immigrant status." He went on to say that "they will not be able to receive welfare, student aid or any other federal public assistance." [Las Vegas Review-Journal, 1/27/13]

**CBPP: Most Immigrants Are Barred From Receiving Federal Welfare Dollars For First Five Years Of Residency.** A report from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities described the eligibility requirements for the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program, which replaced cash welfare benefits in 1996. CBPP said, "Federal law bars states from using federal TANF dollars to assist most legal immigrants until they have been in the United States for at least five years. This restriction applies not only to cash assistance, but also to TANF-funded work supports and services such as child care, transportation, and job training. A substantial percentage of poor children have non-citizen parents who are ineligible for TANF benefits and services." CBPP went on to note that while states can use their own funds to provide benefits to recent immigrants, fewer than half do. [Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 12/4/12]

**FACT: Immigrants Receive Less Public Assistance Than Native-Born Americans**

WSJ: "Low-Income Immigrants Are Less Likely To Be Receiving Public Benefits Than Low-Income Natives." In an editorial "debunking some talk radio myths," The Wall Street Journal reported that "low-income immigrants are less likely" to receive public assistance than low-income, Native-born Americans:

[I]f foreign nationals are primarily attracted to our welfare state, how to explain the fact that low-income immigrants are less likely to be receiving public benefits than low-income natives?

Illegal aliens aren't eligible for Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security and other federal entitlements. But even those low-income immigrants who are eligible for public assistance sign up at lower rates than their native counterparts. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which administers food stamps, noncitizens who qualify are significantly less likely than citizens to participate. [The Wall Street Journal, 11/13/12]

Even Anti-Immigrant Group Has Acknowledged Low Welfare Use Among Undocumented Immigrants. In a 2004 study, the anti-immigrant Center for Immigration Studies found that among undocumented immigrants' use of cash assistance programs "tends to be very low" and that use of Medicaid is less than other households:

Welfare use. Our findings show that many of the preconceived notions about the fiscal impact of illegal households turn out to be inaccurate. In terms of welfare use, receipt of cash assistance programs tends to be very low, while Medicaid use, though significant, is still less than for other households. Only use of food assistance programs is significantly higher than that of the rest of the population. Also, contrary to the perceptions that illegal aliens don't pay payroll taxes, we estimate that more than half of illegals work "on the books." On average, illegal households pay more than \$4,200 a year in all forms of federal taxes. Unfortunately, they impose costs of \$6,950 per household.

Social Security and Medicare. Although we find that the net effect of illegal households is negative at the federal level, the same is not true for Social Security and Medicare. We estimate that illegal households create a combined net benefit for these two programs in excess of \$7 billion a year, accounting for about 4 percent of the total annual surplus in these two programs. However, they create a net deficit of \$17.4 billion in the rest of the budget, for a total net loss of \$10.4 billion. Nonetheless, their impact on Social Security and Medicare is unambiguously positive. [Center for Immigration Studies, August 2004]

Cato Institute: "The Low-Skilled, Predominantly Hispanic Immigrants Who Enter The United States Illegally Do So For One Overriding Purpose -- To Earn Money In The Private Economy." A 2012 study from the Cato Institute concluded that immigrants who come to the United States illegally do so "to build a better life through work, not welfare." From the study:

[I]mmigration to the United States does not pose a long-term burden on U.S. taxpayers. The typical immigrant and his or her descendants pay more in taxes than they consume in government services in terms of net present value. Low-skilled immigrants do impose a net cost on government, in particular on the state and local level, but those costs are often exaggerated by critics of immigration and are offset by broader benefits to the overall economy.

[...]

Immigrants come to America today to build a better life through work, not welfare, just as they have throughout American history. We can see evidence of this in their labor-force participation rates as well as their gravitation toward states that offer the best prospects for employment, not welfare benefits.

The typical foreign-born adult resident of the United States today is more likely to participate in the work force than the typical native-born American. According to the U.S. Department of Labor (2011), the labor-force participation rate of the foreign-born in 2010 was 67.9 percent, compared to the native-born rate of 64.1 percent. The gap was especially high among men. The labor-force participation rate of foreign-born men in 2010 was 80.1 percent, a full 10 percentage points higher than the rate among native-born men.

Labor-force participation rates were highest of all among unauthorized male immigrants in the United States. According to estimates by Jeffrey Passell (2006) of the Pew Hispanic Center, 94 percent of illegal immigrant men were in the labor force in the mid-2000s. This almost universal propensity to work among undocumented men partly reflects the fact of U.S. law that becoming a ward of the state is simply not an option. But it primarily reflects the fact that the low-skilled, predominantly Hispanic immigrants who enter the United States illegally do so for one overriding purpose -- to earn money in the private economy. [The Cato Institute, Winter 2012]

Cato Institute: "If Immigrants Were Primarily Concerned With Collecting Welfare, They Would Not Be Flocking To" States With Low Social Spending. The 2012 Cato Institute study noted that "[if] immigrants were primarily concerned with collecting welfare, they would not be flocking" to "states with relatively low social spending":

The work ethic of immigrants reveals itself further by the kind of states they gravitate to. If we consider changes in the foreign-born populations in individual states, for example, we can see that the largest gains have generally been in states that are relatively stingy in offering public assistance. Journalist Jason Riley, in his book *Let Them In*, noted that many of the states that have seen the largest increases in their immigrant populations in the past decade are also states with relatively low social spending.

Comparing changes in immigrant population since 2000 to levels of social spending confirms Riley's thesis. The 10 states with the largest percentage increase in foreign-born population between 2000 and 2009 spent far less on public assistance per capita in 2009 compared to the 10 states with the slowest-growing foreign-born populations -- \$35 vs. \$166. In the 10 states with the lowest per capita spending on public assistance, the immigrant population grew 31 percent between 2000 and 2009; in the 10 states with the highest per capita spending on public assistance, the foreign-born population grew 13 percent. If immigrants were primarily concerned with collecting welfare, they would not be flocking to such states as Kentucky, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia. Instead, they would be drawn to such states as Michigan, Rhode Island, and Vermont, which in fact have seen very slow growth in their immigrant populations. [The Cato Institute, Winter 2012]