



\$1.5B for 'youth jobs fund'? Critics pan pork in Senate immigration bill

By: Maxim Lott

After a comprehensive immigration bill passed the Senate in June, President Obama says he's "absolutely confident" it can pass the House if put to a vote.

But critics question how many lawmakers have actually read the 1,200-page bill, which they say is packed with hidden pork-barrel spending projects ranging from \$1.5 billion for a "Youth Jobs Program" to millions for immigrant support groups that some say have a political agenda.

"Earmarks, special pork deals, and cash for groups allied with the Obama administration should be eliminated from any final bill," Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky., said in a statement to FoxNews.com.

The largest program FoxNews.com found with tenuous ties to immigration is on page 1,181 of the Senate bill, which allocates \$1.5 billion for a "Youth Jobs Fund" to give states money to "provide ... employment opportunities" for teens and young adults.

The section was introduced by Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., who first proposed the idea in a stand-alone bill in June. He said then that, "we have got to do everything we can to make sure that young Americans have the jobs they need to pay for a college education and to move up the economic ladder."

His office did not respond to a request for comment about why the program is relevant to immigration. Page 219 of the Senate version of the bill also allocates \$50 million plus "such sums as may be necessary" to non-profit "immigrant-serving organizations." The bill says the organizations are to use the money to help immigrants here illegally apply for legal status and citizenship, and to teach them civics and English.

Supporters of that provision say the money will be well-spent.

"Investing in all 11 million aspiring Americans will enable them to contribute even more [to America]," said Julia Toepfer, a spokeswoman for the National Immigrant Justice Center, which provides legal services to thousands of illegal immigrants and which stands to get some of the \$50 million.

But others worry about immigrant activists using the funds to engage in advocacy.

"It would be nice if the groups teach English ... but the money could very well be going to political advocacy," said Heather McDonald, a Manhattan Institute fellow who researches immigration.

Immigrant groups, though, say politics won't influence their services.

"This idea that immigration is all about creating more Democratic voters is ridiculous," Clarissa Martinez, the National Council of La Raza's director of civic engagement and immigration, told FoxNews.com.

"Immigration actually has a history of its fate being determined by both parties, so I think there is a great opportunity for the Republican Party to chart a new course and ask 'how do we make sure these immigrants become good Americans?' How do we support that?"

She added that she believed scrutiny for government money would be strict.

"I don't know if you've ever dealt with government grants, but the amount of paperwork and vetting that is involved, and the amount of scrutiny, is quite steep," Martinez said.

The millions for immigrant service organizations isn't the only money derided as pork. On page 217, there is a line that innocuously references another bill. But as Breitbart.com first noted, the line actually means that the federal government will now give out \$100 million per year, for an indefinite period, for a "Travel Promotion Fund" to advertise U.S. tourism destinations in foreign media outlets. The fund already started in 2011, but the immigration bill provision would extend it indefinitely. How did that get in the bill? It turns out the fund was initially created by legislation pushed by Nevada Sen. Harry Reid -- Las Vegas being one of the main beneficiaries of the tourism advertising. In 2011, Reid said the program is a "wonderful piece of law that I was able to get through the Congress to help Nevada." Several Las Vegas casinos were so happy about the fund that they ran billboards thanking Reid.

Reid's office did not respond to questions.

But some opponents of the Senate bill say that while the pork is bad, it is the least of the bill's problems.

"Under this bill, if you're an illegal immigrant, and you have two misdemeanors on your record, you can get immediate amnesty," McDonald said.

Pages 140-143 of the bill say that illegal immigrants with three or more misdemeanor convictions, or an aggravated felony conviction, shouldn't get legal status unless the administration gives them a waiver "to ensure family unity" or "for humanitarian purposes."

Some supporters of the immigration bill concede that it contains pork.

"It is unjustly packed with pork spending of all kinds," said Alex Nowrasteh, an immigration analyst at the Cato Institute, who also counts as "pork" the increased spending on border security.

But aside from the pork, he says, the bill is mostly good.

"Most sections of the Senate immigration reform bill would improve American immigration law. ... The good portion of the bill increases guest worker visas, although not enough. It allows some unauthorized workers to legalize, but not enough."

The author of this piece can be reached at maxim.lott@foxnews.com or on Twitter at [@maximlott](https://twitter.com/maximlott)