



Walker yields to Republican fringe

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Scott Walker's recent 180 on immigration was a troubling sign. Two years ago, Walker said things like, "The vast majority of people want to come here for the right reasons." And, "If somebody wants to come in and live the American dream and work hard ... we should have a system that works and lets people in."

But presidential candidate Walker now questions even legal immigration, saying, "The next president and the next Congress need to make decisions about a legal immigration system that's based on, first and foremost, protecting American workers and American wages."

Walker added that he'd discussed this with Sen. Jeff Sessions, R-Alabama, who champions the notion that immigrants steal jobs from Americans.

Sessions' views are shared by a small, vocal minority in my party, whom Walker has decided to court. It's bad economics, and bad politics.

"Virtually every economist who studies immigration concludes that it benefits Americans," says one expert, who quotes economist David Card's pithy comment calling research on the topic "the elusive search for negative wage impacts of immigration."

The expert is Alex Nowrasteh of the conservative Cato Institute, who marshals a host of data showing the benefits of admitting educated immigrants under H-1B visas—which would be expanded under a bill whose co-sponsors include Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Florida.

For example, "From 1990 to 2010, 10 percent to 25 percent of the total combined productivity growth across 219 American cities was caused by H-1B workers" in science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

Others agree. Americans for Tax Reform founder Grover Norquist notes a 2006 Heritage Foundation study concluding that "immigrants boost national output, enhance specialization, and provide a net economic benefit."

He also notes data showing that “immigration reform similar to the [2013] Senate plan” would yield some \$1.5 trillion in growth over a decade, while deporting all illegal immigrants would cause a \$2.6 trillion drop in gross domestic product.

Former Congressional Budget Office Director Doug Holtz-Eakin, who heads the right-leaning American Action Forum, is similar.

“A benchmark immigration reform would raise the pace of economic growth by nearly a percentage point over the near term, raise GDP per capita by over \$1,500, and reduce the cumulative federal deficit by over \$2.5 trillion.”

In pushing against this, Sessions et al. assume a static economy in which immigrants compete for jobs with Americans in a zero-sum game. Not so. As Nowrasteh shows, “There is not a fixed supply of jobs to be divided up amongst Americans: The market constantly creates and destroys new job opportunities, and increasing supplies of workers and consumers help that process along.”

This dynamic view was shared by Ronald Reagan, who denounced “shared scarcity” notions in favor of growing the economic pie for all.

And the politics? Walker’s missing the boat here, too. Most Republicans want to stem illegal immigration by sealing the border. But most are not anti-immigration, and favor reform that recognizes we cannot deport 11 million people. Even among self-described Tea Party voters, polling shows two out of three favor a path to citizenship.

Conservative blogger Jennifer Rubin notes “that the temptation in the GOP primary is to play to the loudest voices and the staunchest segment of the party, even though they do not represent a majority of voters in the party, let alone in the general electorate.”

Walker appears to be yielding to that temptation. •