

The Daily Republican

A key ingredient for healthy economy? Immigrants.

By Jennifer Rubin

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I've suggested that the border crisis paradoxically may make it easier in the long run to achieve immigration reform. If everyone agrees to get serious about border security first, other reforms may be less contentious. Indeed, a recent Fox poll shows that if given the choice between doing nothing and setting up a pathway for citizenship (not just legalization), the public favors the latter (65 to 20 percent) as do Republicans (56 to 28 percent). Given specific components of a reform bill, borrowing heavily from what passed the Senate or has been suggested by House leaders, Republicans also favor reform by a large measure.

One way to increase the chances of passing reform is to disabuse lawmakers of the notion that immigration is bad for our economy. There is a correlation between migration into a state and its economic well-being. Alex Nowrasteh of the Cato Institute says: "Immigrants are drawn to states with thriving economies. The destination for large numbers of Hispanic immigrants used to be California until their economy faltered, now many more are going to Texas, Arizona, Florida and Georgia. The same pattern is observed with Puerto Ricans who went to New York for decades but now are branching out to Florida and the Southwest."

It works both ways: Immigrants seek places that are economically thriving, and places that want to thrive want immigrants. One key may be that immigrants, as opposed to domestic workers, are far more likely to move to find jobs.

The numbers crunchers at the conservative American Action Network agree that immigrants move to places where there are jobs. They point to a state like Oklahoma, where there is high growth, low unemployment and an immigrant population that has doubled since 1990. This is why many red states — which have good, job-creating economies — are beginning to draw such large immigrant populations. Utah is routinely named one of the most business-friendly states, and its immigrant population has doubled since 1980.

The association between immigrants and strong economies and job creation is not perfect, of course. There are high-immigrant states that still have relatively high unemployment. If you want a formula for a healthy economy and job market, it would go something like this: Make it easy to do business. Keep taxes and regulation modest,

but don't skimp on education. And welcome immigrants looking for work with open arms.