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Sessions wrong about immigration's impact

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Sen. Jeff Sessions wrote a recent op-ed for the *Washington Post* headlined "America needs to curb immigration flows." He was not talking about *illegal* immigration. He was talking about *legal* immigration.

As chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee's Immigration subcommittee, our senator's view is significant. If there are good reasons to curb the flow of immigration to America, though, Sen. Sessions does not provide us with any. As a matter of fact, his main argument against immigration is historically flawed and a non sequitur.

I have voted for Sen. Sessions multiple times and am a supporter of his. But I believe that he is wrong to blame legal immigrants for economic stagnation.

Sen. Sessions tells us that *legal* immigrants are hurting the American economy, are taking jobs from American workers, and are depressing wages. However, he makes his case using false comparisons.

He says that the restrictions placed on immigration from 1930 till the mid-1960s helped usher in a boom for the American middle class where "real median compensation for U.S. workers surged, increasing more than 90 percent from 1948 to 1973, according to the Economic Policy Institute." He then goes on to say that after the number of legal immigrants began to rise, wages for the American middle class began to stagnate.

His premise is that the more foreign-born workers we have in America, the more stagnant our economy will be, which will hurt the prospects of American-born workers.

However, something else significant happened in America from 1948 to 1973 that caused the American economy to explode and it had nothing to do with immigration controls. America had just won World War II, and for several decades we were the dominant economic power in the world without compare.

Also, we were experiencing the Baby Boom and cities were being expanded, the Interstate Highway system was linking America, and technological advances were accelerating at an astounding rate. We were experiencing a post-war boom that benefited the entire nation.

Tying our economic expansion during this period to an absence of immigrants is poor history and it is a poor way to make a case. By the early 1970s, the labor market was flooded with a massive generation of Baby Boomers going to work in addition to women entering the workforce en masse. There are just too many other factors going on to draw the conclusions that Sen. Sessions does.

In reality, there is strong evidence that makes the opposite case. Multiple economic studies have refuted Sen. Sessions' premise point-by-point (Nowrasteh, Cato Institute; McLaren, UVA; Hong, Indiana) and point to a rise in economic growth associated with an increase in immigration. At the very least, we can see that larger foreign born populations are often an indicator of a healthy economy instead of being a drag on it.

For example, Texas has the 14th lowest unemployment rate in the country at 4.2 percent and a foreign-born population of 16.5 percent, the 7th highest in the U.S. Meanwhile, Alabama is ranked 31st with a 5.7 percent unemployment rate while only 3.4 percent of its population is foreign-born (43rd) and Mississippi is ranked 49th with 6.8 percent unemployment and a meager 2.1 percent of its population is foreign-born (49th).

If Sen. Sessions' premise were true, then we could expect the economies of Alabama and Mississippi to be better than Texas. But Texas was just ranked the No. 1 state for business development by chiefexecutive.net, while Alabama was ranked 24th and Mississippi was ranked 39th. There are clearly other factors at work.

We are a nation of immigrants. As a Christian, I believe that each immigrant is made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27), which implies both inherent dignity *and* remarkable potential. Historically, we have seen immigrants strengthen our great nation, and almost all economists agree that their continued arrival will have a net positive impact on our economy.

America is facing a lot of problems, but the presence of hard-working, skilled, and *legal* immigrants who contribute to our communities, pay taxes, and join in the American Dream is not one of them.