



Trump's Immigration Plan Will Harm Americans and the Economy

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Claiming that the United States takes in too many low-skill immigrants, president Trump endorsed the RAISE Act on August 2, which would reduce legal immigration by half over the next ten years. At a White House event, he said he wanted immigration policy that “puts America first.” But Trump’s immigration plan does not put America first. If the RAISE Act passes, it will harm the U.S. economy without making Americans safer. Instead of blocking workers from entering the country, the government should expand legal, low-skill immigration.

Freer flow of labor creates wealth for both migrants and domestic citizens. Immigrants are twice as likely to start a business as natural-born citizens, and they generally fill education gaps rather than displacing workers. An Indiana University and University of Virginia study found that 1.2 jobs are created for every one immigrant that enters the country. They also raise local wages.

If Trump relaxed immigration laws rather than tightening them, the U.S. would enjoy more of these private sector benefits, more tax revenue, and a healthier economy overall. By shying away from foreign migration, the government will directly deprive U.S. citizens of jobs and prevent businesses from hiring suitable workers. That’s hardly putting America first.

Additionally, immigrants aren’t nearly as dangerous as the secure-the-border crowd would have us believe. The idea that people are entering the U.S. to rape and pillage just plays upon fear—it isn’t backed up by data. Every national census since 1980 shows that native-born Americans are incarcerated at a rate two to five times higher than foreign-born, legal immigrants.

Immigration restrictionists also overstate the danger of terrorism through immigration. Alex Nowrasteh, immigration policy analyst at the libertarian Cato Institute, published a study on the risk of terrorism via immigration. He found that the chance of being killed in a terrorist attack by a lawful permanent immigrant in America between 1975 and 2015 was one in over 1.3 billion each year. The yearly odds of being murdered were 252.9 times higher than being killed by any foreign-born terrorist.

If Americans are too afraid to play those odds, we shouldn’t be drinking alcohol, going to swimming pools, or living in major cities. We certainly shouldn’t be driving cars. The fears surrounding immigrant terrorism and crime are irrational, and perpetuating them is dishonest.

Trump's assertion that the U.S. already admits too many low-skill workers simply isn't true. Though some temporary visas are available, the government issues a maximum of just 5000 permanent, low-skill visas each year. If migrants can no longer come into the country through family connections, they will have to rely on the mind-numbing maze of low-skill immigration visas. The U.S. needs low-skill labor, and much of that labor comes from migrant workers. Slowing this immigration to a trickle will be a blight to American businesses, and many domestic-born citizens will suffer in the economic aftermath.

Critics of increased immigration claim that letting more people come to the U.S. will increase the welfare state. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, however, provides evidence to the contrary. Immigrants currently cannot collect federal food stamps, Medicaid, or child care cash assistance until they've been in the country for five years. These immigrants are paying taxes into a welfare system that natural-born citizens draw from.

Looking back on United States history, we find many instances of unfounded anti-immigration sentiment. The 19th century push against German and Irish Catholic immigrants, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, and the 1924 ban on Asian immigration all seem ridiculous today, but Trump and his supporters are pushing for similarly laughable policies with a straight face.

When Americans look back on historical instances of immigration restriction, they can clearly see the country had lost its way. It's not so easy to recognize the same kind of panic when it's happening currently. The U.S. promise of freedom becomes nothing but lip service in hard times—real or imagined. Now we're at a crossroads. The U.S. can allow more people to enter the country to create wealth or strike a blow to its own economy in the name of "putting America first."