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Report: New Jersey pays double for Trump's immigration plans

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New Jersey would contribute millions more to the White House's immigration enforcement priorities if the budget proposal passes, while potentially losing twice as much in taxes paid by unauthorized immigrants, according to a report released Friday.

The report by Make the Road New Jersey breaks down what the immigration priorities listed in Trump's proposed \$4.1 trillion budget would cost, claiming New Jersey would contribute \$240 million to the estimated \$5.6 billion allotted to President Donald Trump's immigration plans.

Those immigration plans include:

- \$1.6 billion for construction on the border wall
- \$1.3 billion to add beds in detention centers
- \$186 million to hire 1,000 more Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers 606 support staff
- \$100 million to hire 500 Border Patrol agents
- \$132 to expand E-Verify, the government website that businesses use to check whether their employees have work authorization in the U.S.

Meanwhile, the budget proposed earlier this year also calls for cuts in education, transportation, human services, environmental policy and other areas.

"It's shocking for a New Jersey taxpayer like me to find out that Trump wants to use my taxes to fund his war on immigrant families," said Edison Vasquez, a member of Make the Road New Jersey.

The state economy would take a hit as these priorities are enforced because of taxes paid by unauthorized immigrants, according to the report. The Institute for Taxation and Economy Policy estimates that New Jersey's unauthorized immigrants pay around \$587 million in taxes each year.

The thinktank New Jersey Policy Perspective believes the state economy would lose 4.9 percent of its Gross Domestic Product without this demographic, the most severe loss in the continental U.S.

New Jersey has an estimated 498,000 unauthorized immigrants, including 23,000 in Monmouth County, according to figures from the Migration Policy Institute.

Alex Nowrasteh, an immigration policy analyst at the libertarian Cato Institute, said New Jerseyans not only face potential tax increases but a higher tax burden overall if authorities increase deportations.

"With immigration enforcement, it's a double whammy to the taxpayer," he said. "The government spends more money, and there are fewer taxpayers to share the burden afterward."

Michael Bekesha, an attorney at the conservative nonpartisan watchdog group, says the budget proposal would put more resources into an already short-staffed agency, especially since the Jan. 25 executive order said all unauthorized immigrants would be a priority for deportation.

"I think there's always been a problem of lack of resources and lack of staff to enforce the law as written by Congress ... President Trump has changed the prioritization to an extent, which also requires additional resources," he said.

Make the Road New Jersey argues taxpayer money could be better spent on programs like a full-day of pre-kindergarten in public schools or on paying New Jersey Transit's \$35 million deficit. The organization states the estimated \$240 million could cover the cost of those programs, though analysts argue such recommendations oversimplify the budget process.

"Just because you take \$1.6 billion for the construction of the border wall (out of the proposal), that 1.6 billion isn't just going to automatically go to schools," Bekesha said.

He added: "President trump won the election based on his immigration priorities. It would make sense for Congress to spend the money in a way that agrees with the electorate."

Danielle Farrie, research director at the Education Law Center, said the federal budget should prioritize access to high-quality education for all students, including those in low-income districts. New Jersey public schools stand to lose \$100 million under the proposed budget.

"The way to achieve this is by providing resources that would allow states to expand programs that work, such as community schools and high-quality preschool," Farrie said.

Nowrasteh said spending on immigration can be "destructive," but that it's not necessary to invest taxpayer dollars in other areas.

"I think the best use of these resources is to cut spending in all these areas, and make it so hardworking Americans get to keep a little more of their income."