

The economic case for immigration

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The U.S. House wants to embark on piecemeal efforts on immigration reform that are to comprehensive what a handful of sand is to a beach. It is unlikely, in any case, that it will do whatever it's going to do before a long August recess.

Which is why the president, according to an Express-News article Monday by Gary Martin of the newspaper's Washington bureau, will very publicly begin putting on the pressure.

He will make the case that a pathway to citizenship for the 11 million undocumented workers in the country means economic benefit for the country. It is not a difficult case to make.

The Congressional Budget Office says the Senate's reform bill would increase gross domestic product per capita and increase wages at all levels.

The CBO has also said that the immigration reform bill would reduce the deficit by \$197 billion over the next 10 years and \$700 billion over the following decade.

The president's own economic advisers say legal status for undocumented immigrants would increase real GDP by \$700 billion in 2023 and the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy says state and local governments would get \$2 billion more per year in tax revenues.

On the other side, The Heritage Foundation, led by former Sen. Jim DeMint, released a report in May that estimated the cost of this pathway to citizenship at \$6.3 trillion over 50 years, as these immigrants start tapping Social Security, welfare and other programs. But the report was disputed even by other conservative groups, notably Grover Norquist's Americans for Tax Reform and the Libertarian Cato Institute. Both had issues with the methodology.

Which leaves House Republicans with the rule-of-law argument as they propose bills heavy on enforcement and light on just about everything else. And the problem with that argument is that a law so unfair and unmanageable that it invites lawbreaking amounts to little rule at all.

On Sunday, Sarah Zenaida Gould, the lead curatorial researcher at the University of Texas Institute of Texan Cultures, explained in an article that the reasons for this country's early immigration do not differ markedly from today's reasons. People wanted a better life. And the resistance, then as now, was heated, including here in Texas.

She wrote, “Make no mistake, our immigration laws have long reflected our views on race and class, sometimes revealing the nastiest strains of nativism running through our society.”

This is given voice today by those who don't see net economic contributors but just new Democrats. Distilling the argument to economic gain is the best way to cut through this.

And we know it will still be a hard sell — not because the president and others lack facts. It will be because many members of the U.S. House want to stand athwart, not just facts, but what history has abundantly taught us.

Immigrants allowed to become citizens have made this country great.