

# The Star-Ledger

## The flawed Heritage study on immigration reform

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The Heritage Foundation belly-flopped into the debate over immigration reform this week, releasing a study that painted immigrants as a bunch of welfare loafers, which got roundly criticized as deeply flawed.

The think tank's analysis, published Monday, found that the Senate's bipartisan reform bill — which gives the 11 million immigrants who are already in this country illegally a path to citizenship — would create a "lifetime fiscal deficit" of at least \$6.3 trillion.

This is based on the assumption that these immigrants would receive \$9.4 trillion in government benefits and services, while paying only \$3.1 trillion in taxes.

Problem is, that's only half the story.

Simply calculating the difference between future taxes paid and benefits received doesn't account for the actual economic impact of immigration. Why? Because it assumes all these new arrivals, and their descendents, will be poor for the rest of their lives. In fact, research has shown that immigrants give a huge boost to our economy because they tend to work harder, start more businesses and assimilate as quickly as those who came before them.

Besides writing off the entire concept of upward mobility, the Heritage study also ignored highly educated, skilled immigrants.

But perhaps that's understandable, given that its co-author, Jason Richwine, started out with the premise that immigrants have lower IQs than "white natives" — an assertion he's made previously.

We've heard that one before: Of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe. Of the Irish. Of Jews. All were once accused of being intellectually inferior, yet went on to great success in this country.

Now we're hearing it of Hispanics, the newest wave of arrivals — a giveaway that this cadre against immigration reform still includes plenty of old-fashioned bigots.

But the bigger crime of the Heritage study was the gap in its research. After factoring in economic productivity, other analyses found that the contributions of immigrants "dwarf their fiscal costs," according to Shikha Dalmia, a senior analyst at the Reason Foundation.

For example, low-skilled immigrants who entered the country illegally cost the Texas treasury \$504 million more than they paid in taxes in 2005, a 2006 study found. Yet

without their contributions to local business, the state's economy would have shrunk by 2.1 percent, or \$17.7 billion.

Which is why the Heritage study got panned by so many conservatives, including the Cato Institute, Grover Norquist's Americans for Tax Reform, and Republican congressional leaders Paul Ryan and Marco Rubio. After all, the economic productivity of immigrants has been shown to increase the incomes of native-born Americans, too.

By ignoring such a key factor, the authors of this study have made themselves, not immigrants, look ignorant.