



Conservative Think Tank Undermines Right-Wing Misinformation On Cost Of Immigration Reform

By: Rebecca Leber - February 20, 2013

Opponents of comprehensive immigration reform in the House of Representatives and at Heritage have stuck to the myth that a path to citizenship would “cost trillions.” Citing a debunked 2007 Heritage study about immigration reform’s impact on Medicare and Social Security, Rep. Lou Barletta (R-PA) argued on ABC’s This Week, “One thing that we’re missing in this whole debate about illegal immigration is the cost.”

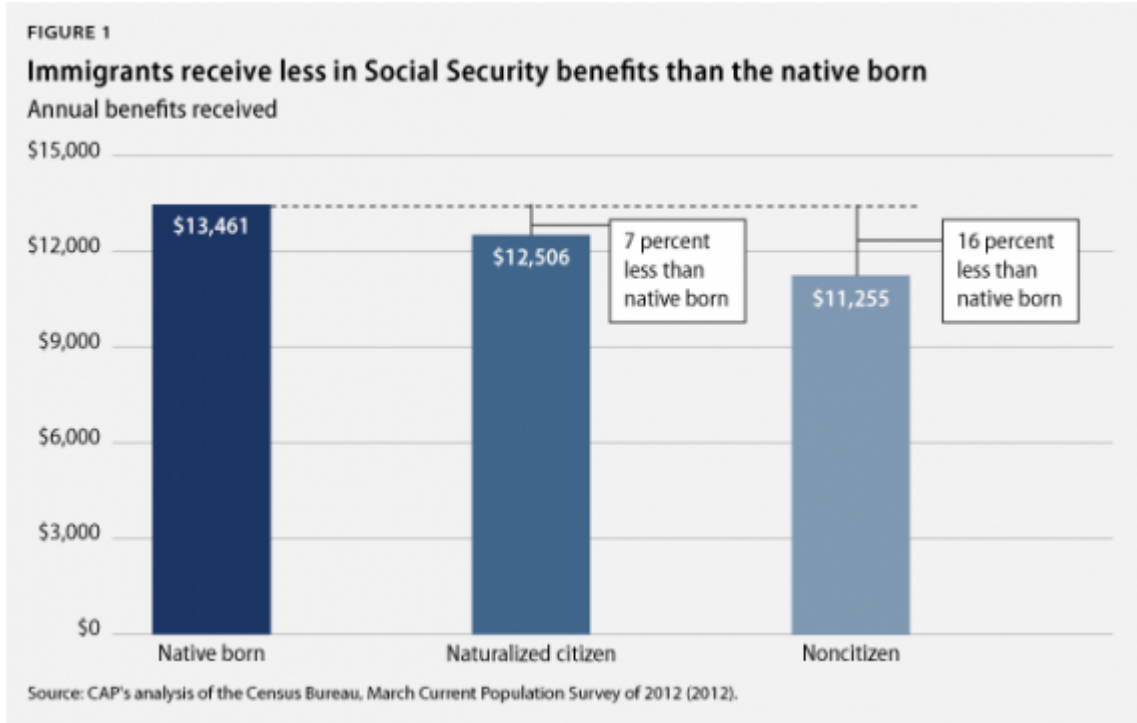
Mainstream economic consensus, however, says otherwise. Immigrants contribute far more into the economy than what they receive, paying taxes and creating jobs.

And a new paper from the libertarian Cato Institute agrees, undermining the stereotype that immigrants burden the economy. According to Cato, immigrants are less likely to use a range of social safety net programs than U.S. citizens:

The most recent Census data confirm that low-income non-citizen adults and children generally have lower rates of use of public benefits than native-born adults or citizen children whose parents are also citizens. Non-citizen immigrants’ (both adults and children) utilization of Medicaid, SNAP, and SSI are lower. Adult receipt of cash assistance is uncommon (2% to 3%), regardless of citizenship status. Non-citizen children are less likely to use cash assistance than citizen children with citizen parents.

Moreover, when low-income non-citizens receive public benefits, the average value of benefits per recipient is almost always lower than for those who are native-born. This held true for both adults and children in Medicaid and SNAP, and for non-citizen children in households receiving cash assistance and SSI benefits. The average per recipient benefit levels were similar for adults receiving cash assistance or SSI.

Cato's results are in line with findings from the Center for American Progress that show immigrants pay substantially more than what they receive in benefits. The chart below shows that immigrants receive 16 percent less in Social Security benefits than the native born:



Immigrants — legal and undocumented — are barred from many government programs, and would not be eligible for health care coverage under President Obama's reform proposal. Right now, DREAMers granted deferred action remain ineligible for Obamacare, and even in-state tuition in many states.

That has not stopped the Heritage Foundation from arguing a path to citizenship will be too costly, or the New York Times from taking a similarly flawed snapshot that fails to include the billions of dollars in taxes immigrants pay into the system.

Comprehensive reform with a path to citizenship would expand virtually every sector of the economy, injecting \$1.5 trillion to the GDP and up to \$5.4 billion more in tax revenue.