

Voice For Liberty in Wichita

Individual liberty, limited government, and free markets in Wichita and Kansas

In Kansas, no E-verify, please

by Bob Weeks on March 30, 2012

The hope that if we can somehow stop illegal immigrants from obtaining jobs, then unemployed Americans can go back to work, is a false hope. For that and other reasons, I can't join with Kansas conservatives who support E-verify and other harsh anti-immigrant measures.

The economic reality is that immigrants — legal and not — contribute to our nation's economy. Those who believe that illegal immigrants “steal” jobs from Americans treat immigrant labor as equal to native-born workers. But that's not the case: In many situations, if immigrant labor is not available, the jobs simply won't be done.

As an example, last year Georgia passed a law requiring employers to verify eligibility to work. The result? As [described in the Atlanta Journal-Constitution](#): “Thanks to the resulting labor shortage, Georgia farmers have been forced to leave millions of dollars' worth of blueberries, onions, melons and other crops unharvested and rotting in the fields. It has also put state officials into something of a panic at the damage they've done to Georgia's largest industry.”

Kansas needs workers, too. Our [agriculture secretary is seeking waivers](#) that would allow Kansas farms to hire illegal workers. It's not just so that farmers can pay these workers low wages. As reported in [Farmers push to hire illegal immigrants](#): “T.J. Curtis back at Forget-Me-Not Farms has jobs available — \$32,000 a year, with health care and retirement benefits.” He wants to hire 75 workers.

Other writers have noted the importance of low-skilled laborers to our economy. Writing for the Cato Institute, Daniel Griswold explains:

If our politicians actually did succeed in removing millions of unauthorized immigrants from the workforce, middle-class jobs now held by Americans would be in jeopardy. A shortage of low-skilled workers in the agricultural, tourism, food processing, landscaping and other sectors would mean less investment and less employment for managers, accountants, sales reps and other downstream and upstream workers.

A 2009 study for the Cato Institute found that a 28.6 percent reduction in the number of unauthorized low-skilled immigrants in the United States through increased border and interior enforcement actually would cost U.S. households \$80 billion a year. The study

found that a resulting decline in immigrant labor would mean less investment, more money diverted to smuggler fees and other unproductive uses, and relatively fewer jobs further up the skills ladder. ([E-Verify Threatens American Jobs and Liberties](#))

Griswold also reports on the problems found in E-verify pilot programs. Half of unauthorized workers were not flagged by the system. Then, there's the problem of the millions of legal workers who were falsely denied permission to work by E-verify. Wrote the Cato Institute's Jim Harper: "Deemed ineligible by a database, millions each year would go pleading to the Department of Homeland Security and the Social Security Administration for the right to work."

Griswold commented "Isn't this the kind of intrusive government that tea party members oppose?"

An economic case for immigration

Benjamin Powell, in his article [An Economic Case for Immigration](#) explains why we ought to welcome immigrants to our country.

To those who believe that immigrants are a "drag" on the economy, Powell explains: "Immigrants boost the overall size of the U.S. economy for the existing native-born population. Free trade in labor, like trade in goods and services, frees existing Americans to do what's in their comparative advantage. In fact, the basic economic case for free trade in labor really isn't different than that for trade in goods and services. Economists are in nearly universal agreement that free trade promotes national wealth."

The benefit is estimated at \$36 billion per year — a drop in the bucket given the size of our economy. But it is a benefit, not a drag.

As for the "taking our jobs" claim, Powell counters: "That immigrants 'take our jobs' is probably the most repeated and most economically ignorant objection to immigration. It's a classic example of Bastiat's 'what is seen and what is not.' Everyone can see when an immigrant takes a job that used to be held by a native-born worker. But not everyone sees the secondary consequence of the new jobs that are created because native-born labor has been freed up for more-productive uses. In the market's process of creative destruction, jobs are created and destroyed all the time."

As for depressing the wages of native-born workers, Powell writes: "Economists find no evidence for widespread wage decreases. The debate on the effect of immigration on wage rates of native-born workers has, believe it or not, narrowed down to the effect on wages of high-school drop-outs. Estimates range from slightly positive to, at worst, an eight-percent fall. ... Those immigrants who increase the supply of labor also demand goods and services, causing the demand for labor to increase."

There is the problem of illegal immigrants who commit crimes, and it's a driving factor for many who oppose immigration, illegal or not. But a crime wave fueled by illegal immigrants is an illusion not supported by data. In the paper [The Myth of Immigrant](#)

[Criminality and the Paradox of Assimilation: Incarceration Rates Among Native and Foreign-Born Men](#), researchers concluded: “In fact, data from the census and other sources show that for every ethnic group without exception, incarceration rates among young men are lowest for immigrants, even those who are the least educated. This holds true especially for the Mexicans, Salvadorans, and Guatemalans who make up the bulk of the undocumented population. What is more, these patterns have been observed consistently over the last three decennial censuses, a period that spans the current era of mass immigration, and recall similar national-level findings reported by three major government commissions during the first three decades of the 20th century.”

A draconian immigration policy, perversely, makes it *easier* for criminals to enter the U.S., explains Powell: “... Right now terrorists could sneak into the country illegally while hiding among more than a million other illegal immigrants crossing the border in the desert. If a more open immigration policy were established, the legitimate workers could come through check points, freeing existing border-control enforcement to focus on finding the terrorists.”

Right now, those who simply want to work are forced to mix in with criminals — in fact, to become criminals themselves — to enter the U.S.

Finally, American citizens need to be concerned about the potential uses of a national database that would power the E-verify system. [Cato’s Jim Harper explains](#):

“Even if a national employment eligibility verification system were made workable, it is not a system we should want. Once built, this government monitoring system would soon be extended to housing, financial services, and other essentials to try to get at illegal immigrants. It would also be converted to policy goals well beyond immigration control. Direct regulatory power over American citizens would flow to the federal government. Even more information about Americans’ lives would flow into federal government databases. And Americans’ sensitive personal data would be exposed to more security threats.”

Harper’s paper on this topic is [Internal Enforcement, E-Verify, and the Road to a National ID](#).