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## Are You Serious About Jobs?



SOURCE: AP/Isaac Brekken

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) speaks about his jobs bill in Nevada on February 10, 2010. Despite Sen. Reid's praise on a recent show of bipartisanship, a band of anti-immigration conservatives threaten to vote against the bill's measures in a move to turn this much-needed economic debate into an attack on immigrant workers.

**By Angela Maria Kelley, Gebe Martinez | March 2, 2010**

The recent show of bipartisanship on a Senate bill to spur job growth was so rare that Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) was downright *wistful*, saying, "I hope this is a beginning of a new day here in the Senate."

It is good news, indeed, that progress is being made on additional measures to bring down unemployment. But a band of anti-immigration conservatives are threatening to vote against these measures in a political move to turn this much-needed economic debate into a capricious attack on immigrant workers. This group of senators wants to pile on current restrictions banning employers from hiring undocumented immigrants by adding more burdensome and faulty employment verification systems. That would not only make it harder for employers to grow jobs but also would not solve illegal immigration.

If these senators were truly focused on economic improvements that create and sustain jobs for voters in their home states, they would recognize that immigrants don't stand in the way of economic growth—they actually feed it. Numerous economic studies from across the ideological spectrum show that immigrant workers are important to economic growth.

A recent study by the Center for American Progress and the Immigration Policy Center demonstrates that a comprehensive immigration reform package would yield an additional **\$1.5 trillion in cumulative U.S. gross domestic product over 10 years**. Such an overhaul of the immigration system would require a rigorous program that legalizes current undocumented immigrants, forces employers to follow labor and wage laws, creates a flexible visa system to meet future economic needs, and maintains strong border enforcement.

Providing full labor rights to all U.S.-born and immigrant workers would result in higher wages, increased productivity, and an actual decrease in the economy's demand for new immigrant workers who are easily exploited and underpaid, according to the study. The higher wages of newly legalized workers would generate \$4.5 billion to \$5.4 billion in additional net tax revenue, and a rise in personal income of this scale would generate consumer spending sufficient to support 750,000 to 900,000 jobs during the first three years of the program.

The libertarian Cato Institute reached a similar finding in separate research last year, which concluded that legalization of low-skilled immigrant workers would "**yield significant income gains**" for American workers.

Immigration hardliners play to U.S. workers' fears about the recession, falsely arguing that undocumented immigration is a major cause for high unemployment. A recent analysis by the Economic Policy Institute **rebutted** this misconception, saying, "more people, including more foreigners, do not mean lower wages or higher unemployment. If they did, every time a baby was born or a new graduate entered the labor force, they would hurt existing workers ... while new workers add to the supply of labor, they also consume goods and services, creating more jobs."

The economic gains to the nation from comprehensive immigration reform and the leveling of working conditions and pay that would come to individual workers from comprehensive immigration reform are key reasons why labor groups have united behind the campaign to win enactment of the bill. "The **most direct way to raise standards for all workers**—native born and immigrant—is for Congress to pass comprehensive immigration reform," said Joe Hansen, president of the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union, in a statement.

But instead of looking for new ways to reboot the economy, immigration hardliners are pushing for new restrictions in pending jobs bills that would unnecessarily hamper U.S. businesses' ability to hire even native workers and those who are legally allowed to work in the United States.

As for the immigration hardliners, they would be wise to stop the political gamesmanship on important economic measures and consider that the very issue they like to politicize would in fact be an economic winner.

**See also:**

- [Ask the Expert: Immigration Reform Is an Economy Booster](#)

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