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## Guest column: Immigration reform would help economy

*JAY BYERS and MARK ROSENBURY are Iowa Immigration Education Coalition Steering Committee members. Contact: [info@iowaimmigrationeducation.org](mailto:info@iowaimmigrationeducation.org)*

With the economic crisis foremost on everyone's mind, it is hardly a surprise that the issue of immigration reform has taken a backseat. While it is imperative that Congress act quickly to address this economic and labor crisis, what might come as a surprise is that immigration reform - seemingly unrelated - may actually be a key facet in invigorating our stagnant economy and creating jobs for Americans.

A recent report by UCLA's Raul Hinojosa-Ojeda calculates the economic effects of the three most often discussed immigration scenarios: (1) comprehensive immigration reform, including a pathway to legalization; (2) a temporary worker program, with no pathway to legalization; and (3) mass deportations coupled with sealing the border.

The study shows that comprehensive immigration reform would produce the greatest economic benefits for Americans, finding that:

- It would generate an additional \$1.5 trillion in U.S. GDP over 10 years. Within three years, it would boost wages for native-born and newly legalized immigrants, increase tax revenues up to \$4.5 billion to \$5.4 billion and increase consumer spending - enough to support 750,000 to 900,000 new U.S. jobs.
- The temporary worker program is estimated to increase U.S. GDP by \$792 billion over 10 years, while decreasing wages for both native-born and newly legalized immigrants.
- Mass deportation would reduce the U.S. GDP an estimated \$2.6 trillion over 10 years - providing some increase in wages for less-skilled native workers but reducing wages for higher-skilled natives and causing widespread job loss.

This does not account for the cost of deportation, which has been estimated at over \$200 billion.

Iowa-specific studies echo these findings. According to the Iowa Policy Project, unauthorized families in Iowa paid between \$40 million and \$62 million in taxes in 2007 alone. Another study, by the Perryman Group, found that if all undocumented immigrants were removed from Iowa, local economies would lose \$1.4 billion in potential revenue, \$613.4 million in economic output, and approximately 8,800 jobs. A study by the National Milk Producers Federation confirms the essential role of immigrant labor. A loss of 50 percent of immigrant dairy farm-workers nationally would lower sales annually by \$6.7 billion and reduce total economic output by \$11.2 billion, while removing all immigrant dairy workers would produce a net loss of nearly 133,000 U.S. jobs.

This validates what numerous other reports have stated in the past year. Organizations ranging from the libertarian Cato Institute, to the widely acclaimed Brookings Institute, to the bipartisan Council on Foreign Relations have all weighed in on the economic ramifications of reform, and all agree - America needs comprehensive immigration reform.

Much of the recent discourse concerning reform has been divisive in nature, and falls out of line with the fact that comprehensive immigration reform has traditionally garnered bipartisan support. Some might even be surprised at the fact that comprehensive immigration reform enjoys vast public support.

According to a January 2010 poll by the Benenson Strategy Group, 62 percent of Republican voters and 87 percent of voters overall support an earned path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants.

In the coming months, Congress has a chance to make real, positive change for our country. We all agree that our economy needs to be fixed and we all agree that our current immigration policies are broken. Why not make the decision that benefits everyone?

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