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## Immigrant legalization viewed as a boon

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WASHINGTON - Legalizing the status of the roughly 12 million unauthorized immigrants living in this country would create jobs, increase wages and boost the sagging U.S. economy, an academic study released Thursday says.

The study conducted by Raúl Hinojosa-Ojeda at the University of California at Los Angeles finds citizenship and flexible limits on legal immigration would serve future labor demands and boost wages for native-born workers.

"Immigration has a positive effect on the economy," Hinojosa-Ojeda said on the release of the study titled "Raising the Floor for American Workers: The Economic Benefits of Comprehensive Immigration Reform."

Hinojosa-Ojeda said legalizing unauthorized immigrants already here could add \$1.5 trillion to the gross domestic product over the next 10 years.

President Barack Obama has urged Congress to pass immigration reform legislation this year that provides a path to citizenship for the undocumented. Republicans have opposed such a path as an amnesty for lawbreakers.

"Illegal immigrants take jobs from American workers, particularly poor and disadvantaged citizens and legal immigrants," said Rep. Lamar Smith, R-San Antonio.

"With 15 million Americans out of work, it's hard to believe that anyone would give amnesty to 12 million illegal immigrants," said Smith, the ranking Republican on the House judiciary panel.

But Daniel Griswold, an economist with the **Cato Institute**, a libertarian-leaning think tank, agreed with many of the study's findings. He said previous enforcement-only efforts to curb unauthorized immigration have been costly failures.

The study was released by the Center for American Progress and the Immigration Policy Center, groups that back legalization proposals.

It was based on surveys taken after the 1986 immigration reform bill that provided legal status for 3 million unauthorized immigrants. The result was increased wages and productivity, Hinojosa-Ojeda said.

As wages and productivity rise, demand for new immigrant workers declines and shrinks the market for easily exploited, low-wage workers, the study found.

Projections show legalizing today's unauthorized immigrants would translate into an increase in personal income that would provide as much as \$5.4 billion in additional tax revenue over three years, and the resulting consumer spending could create and support up to 900,000 new jobs, the report says.

A mass deportation of 12 million immigrants, on the other hand, would reduce the gross domestic product by \$2.6 trillion over 10 years, the study reported.

Smith said the research actually bolstered the argument of those who oppose legalization for unauthorized immigrants.

"Even the study admits that the best outcome for American low-skilled workers is the removal of the illegal population," Smith said.

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