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Posted on Tue, Apr. 27, 2010

COMMENTARY

**U.S. needs to let more workers in**

**Increasing legal immigration would help the economy and law enforcement.**

By Daniel Griswold

By Daniel Griswold

With Congress' battered Democratic majority needing a base-energizing success to take into the fall elections - and with climate-change legislation stumbling badly out of the gate - party leaders suggested last week that they may bring immigration reform in from the cold this year after all.

It would be a good choice for Democrats. If a few Republicans can be persuaded to consider immigration reform on its merits - and not through the xenophobic lens of a noisy minority within their base - President Obama could score a legislative victory in a filibuster-free walk.

The evidence favoring immigration reform is stark in a way that ought to appeal to Republicans. A robust temporary-worker program would reduce illegal immigration and add billions of dollars in productivity to the U.S. economy.

Without immigration reform, the problem of illegal immigration will only grow worse as the U.S. labor market slowly recovers from the recession. The number of illegal immigrants in the United States has dropped to 11 million from its peak in 2007, but it will likely begin to grow again as demand for less-skilled workers picks up with the economy.

The economic and demographic realities that have fueled illegal immigration are still in place. In normal years, the U.S. economy produces hundreds of thousands of new jobs in retail, landscaping, food preparation and service, and home and commercial cleaning, all of which attract immigrants with limited job skills.

At the same time, the number of native-born Americans satisfied with such jobs continues to decline as the population becomes older and better-educated. The number of adult Americans without a high school diploma is expected to drop by another two to three million over the next decade. Yet our immigration system offers no means for a sufficient number of foreign-born workers to enter the country legally and fill that gap. So they enter illegally.

The key to reducing illegal immigration will be a strong temporary-worker program. This has been the missing ingredient of past efforts.

The 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act legalized almost three million illegal immigrants. It also ramped up enforcement through increased border patrols and sanctions against those employing illegal workers. Yet it contained no provision for expanding legal immigration. Today, everybody agrees the act was a failure.

We know from experience that expanding opportunities for legal immigration can sharply reduce illegal immigration. In the 1950s, Congress dramatically expanded the number of temporary-worker visas through the Bracero Program. The result was a 95 percent drop in arrests at the border. If Mexican and Central American workers know they can enter the country legally to fill jobs, they will be far less likely to enter illegally.

A workable temporary-visa program would allow border agents to concentrate their efforts on intercepting real criminals and terrorists at the border. It would also reduce the temptation to hire illegal workers, in turn reducing the need to raid workplaces and impose national ID cards, employment verification systems, and other burdens on American citizens.

Allowing more legal workers to enter the country would also boost the productive capacity of our economy by allowing important sectors to expand, creating more middle-class employment opportunities for Americans. A 2009 Cato Institute study predicted that a sufficient temporary-worker program would boost the real income of U.S. households by \$180 billion a year. A January study by the Center for American Progress came to a similar conclusion.

Enforcing a flawed immigration system has wasted tax dollars, frustrated the public, and created an underground



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labor force living in a legal twilight zone. The answer is comprehensive reform offering earned legalization to the millions of undocumented workers already here, temporary visas to new workers to meet our future labor needs, and sensible enforcement aimed at the remaining small minority that refuses to work within the new system.

The president and lawmakers from both parties need only look at the available data to find the path to effective immigration reform.

Daniel Griswold is director of the Center for Trade Policy Studies at the Cato Institute and the author of "Mad About Trade: Why Main Street America Should Embrace Globalization." He can be reached at [dgriswold@cato.org](mailto:dgriswold@cato.org).

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**Rollie Kenmore** Posted 04:59 AM, 04/27/2010  
Griswold...is right on target... Why not just open up the borders? Save a lot of money, anyway... It is just a matter of time...when Mexico will reclaim its lost territories, anyway... California and Texas and Arizona are Mexican...just wait until they get the territories swamped with illegals... Griswolds are ruining this country...

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**njguy42** Posted 05:00 AM, 04/27/2010  
I couldn't disagree with Mr. Griswold more. I had the good fortune of studying the 1986 law in 1985, when it was in the sausage-making stage and my professor served on the staff of then Rep. Lee Hamilton (D-IN). You're right everyone agrees the law is broken, but you're absolutely wrong as to why. Far from "ramping up enforcement," the 1986 immigration reform act turned overseeing immigration enforcement to overlooking immigration enforcement: it placed the burden of proving identity and residency/immigration status on the employer s well as enforcement. The 1986 law was a joke, not a solution. It was turned oversight of the henhouse to the foxes. This country better wake up: if we need more family physicians, why can't American students get into US medical schools? If we need more science and math teachers, why not train Americans for those jobs, rather than recruit foreigners? Far from xenophobia, my interest in promoting American self-help before turning our sights to overseas is an interest in preserving American greatness by investing in and supporting American citizens. I'm all for immigration, but not at the expense of American quality of life and to the disadvantage of American workers.

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**big geoff** Posted 07:35 AM, 04/27/2010  
It's all about the Demoncrats buying more votes. They already have 95% of the AA community now they want the Mexicans to blindly follow them as well.

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**Estoban** Posted 08:08 AM, 04/27/2010  
What an assinine plan. There are 15 million unemployed Americans, some losing cars and homes, looking for ANY job to feed and shelter their families. Those entry level jobs that teach our children a strong work ethic have been stolen by felon illegal aliens. Teen unemployment is 28%(40% for blacks!). American college students also face low-level part time jobs vanishing to those who have no business here. The government is bringing in 125,000 foreign workers each month adding to competition for jobs of our unemployed millions. Only two groups are benefitting: greedy, criminal employers and greedy, criminal illegal aliens.

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**holman** Posted 08:55 AM, 04/27/2010  
With regard to Mexico's objections to Arizona's immigration law upgrades, I want complete reciprocity. I want the same treatment from Mexican authorities if I am caught in their country illegally. The various Mexican state authorities should have no right to detain me. I want an ITN (individual tax number) equivalent issued by the federal taxation authorities that allow me to borrow money, buy real estate, and obtain motor vehicle operators licenses, as well as other professional licenses whether I am legally in their country or not. Our federal government currently issues ITNs to illegals and the IRS is blocked from any action regarding illegal residency. Banks specialize in loaning money to illegals who desire to purchase a home in America with these ITNs. If caught carrying a weapon, I want the same treatment. If involved in an auto accident, I want the treatment. Mexico is absolutely brutal and highly discriminatory against American citizens in all these scenarios. And Mexico has got an excellent health care system. You just have to pay cash or have Mexican health insurance. And their prices are one-tenth of what is charged here in the U.S. I want the same access to their health care system as we afford them here. I want citizenship for my offspring if they are born in Mexico. I want to have the same opportunity to flee my country and reside in Mexico should my country become oppressive due to lopsided federal law designed to punish me and redistribute the product of my labor. And I am very serious about this. I want complete reciprocity no matter what immigration law we settle upon. I want the same opportunity for working Americans to take over Mexico, and for the same reasons they come here. Opportunity. I want to have the opportunity to vote with my feet should my country become too oppressive.

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