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Ezra Klein

Economic and Domestic Policy, and Lots of It

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THINK TANK

- This Congressional Research Service [report](#) on derivatives is probably the clearest thing anyone has ever written on the subject - myself included.
- Did financial illiteracy [contribute](#) to the subprime crisis? Seems so: "Twenty percent of the borrowers in the bottom quartile of our financial literacy index have experienced foreclosure, compared to only 5 percent of those in the top quartile."
- Raj Date writes a great paper [explaining](#) too-big-to-fail, and the options for getting past it.
- The Center for American Progress lays out [what you'd actually need to do](#) to balance the 2015 budget entirely with spending cuts.
- If we're actually going to start in on immigration reform, people should think through the Drum Major Institute's [take](#) on the subject, which tries to build out an immigration-reform policy that works for the legal middle class.

LATEST TWEETS

Rush Limbaugh is now officially the equivalent of a 9/11 truther.
<http://bit.ly/WaXePGh> 37

Reform first, then enforcement

The politically plausible debate on immigration reform seems to range from enforcement only (Republicans) to enforcement first (Democrats). Over at Cato, Daniel Griswold proclaims this [backwards](#):

Requiring successful enforcement of the current immigration laws before they can be changed is a non sequitur. It's like saying, in 1932, that we can't repeal the nationwide prohibition on alcohol consumption until we've drastically reduced the number of moonshine stills and bootleggers. But Prohibition itself created the conditions for the rise of those underground enterprises, and the repeal of Prohibition was necessary before the government could "get control" of its unintended consequences.

Illegal immigration is the Prohibition debate of our day. By essentially barring the legal entry of low-skilled immigrant workers, our own government has created the conditions for an underground labor market, complete with smuggling and day-labor operations. As long as the government maintains this prohibition, illegal immigration will be widespread, and the cost of reducing it, in tax dollars and compromised civil liberties, will be enormous.

[...]

If we want to "get control" of our border with Mexico, the smartest thing we could do would be to allow more workers to enter the United States legally under the umbrella of comprehensive immigration reform. Then we could focus our enforcement resources on a much smaller number of people who for whatever reason are still operating outside the law.

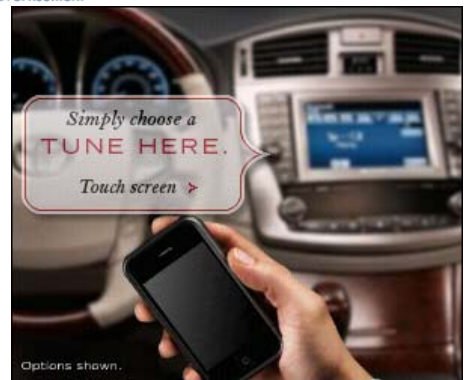
By Ezra Klein | April 30, 2010; 12:50 PM ET
Categories: [Immigration](#)

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Comments

That's exactly what they said with the amnesty back in 1986. How well did that work out?

Posted by: ath17 | April 30, 2010 1:29 PM | Report abuse

You're looking too narrowly at what the 1986 IRCA did and didn't do. It did very little to reform the process for new immigration.

John

Posted by: toshiaki | April 30, 2010 1:34 PM | Report abuse

Wasn't NAFTA supposed to do something like that?

Posted by: justNat | April 30, 2010 1:44 PM | Report abuse

It's not about amnesty, it's about greatly expanding legal immigration. We need more young, hard working Americans. They want to come. Let them in. The prohibition analogy is spot on.

Posted by: staticvars | April 30, 2010 1:44 PM | Report abuse

now that's the cato i used to know: actually willing to take a principled pro-libertarian stand. too bad so many right-wing hacks have their desks there now; as a result, the brand is permanently sullied and i no longer expect something like this out of cato.

Posted by: howard16 | April 30, 2010 1:48 PM | Report abuse

The cato plan is remarkably similar to the Bush plan that got defeated by a combination of the right wing Republicans and the "I hate anything Bush proposes" Democrats. It is good to see that someone like Ezra can appreciate some of the innovative ideas of the Bush administration, now that time and space have cleared away a lot of the political smoke.

Posted by: cummije5 | April 30, 2010 1:58 PM | Report abuse

Where does the Wa Po get these loser bloggers? Are they all stamped out of the same template?

In 1986 we were told that was the last time. We will honor that statement. There will not be another amnesty. In fact the mood is swinging towards deportation and a solid security fence.

Enough of the racist open borders crowd. Clearly they hate African American since they have been the most harmed by illegals.

Posted by: wj03412000 | April 30, 2010 2:11 PM | Report abuse

For the record, I really don't appreciate you making me mildly agree with people from the Cato Institute like this.

Posted by: slag | April 30, 2010 2:19 PM | Report abuse

You're kidding right? I've now read dozen of news articles about immigration reform and I have to say this one tops the list at being the most idiotic one yet. The first problem with your assessment is that you don't live in the southwest. Need I say more? The real problem is with the companies that are allowed to hire these workers. They should be fined, jailed and their business dissolved. This is

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coupled with the fact that the Fed's minimally enforce Federal immigration laws. As a matter of fact you should be tarred and feathered for just suggesting it. I think before you come up with any more bright ideas for the FOLKS in the southwest you should ask us what we think. I applaud AZ for taking the first step and I am standing with Texas and New Mexico to follow suit as it's long overdue.

Posted by: eruditekreeton | April 30, 2010 2:22 PM | [Report abuse](#)

The failure to grapple seriously with the American unemployment crisis is appalling.

Yes, enforcement first. And that means, hit the employers for hiring illegals. Hard, again and again, until those lower level wages RISE and until the unemployment rate for unskilled black men FALLS.

Why is that so hard to understand, by all those liberal policy wonks? Don't you know any unemployed? Hello??

And the notion that appears above, that we need more young immigrants who are eager to work - dude, there are two new grads in my family, very smart, lovely young AMERICANS, and they cannot find a job. They are living off of their parents and very demoralized.

Word to the clueless: GET REAL!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Posted by: mminka | April 30, 2010 2:23 PM | [Report abuse](#)

By far the dumbest idea I have ever read.

Posted by: lancediverson | April 30, 2010 2:34 PM | [Report abuse](#)

Cretin, yes. Erudite, no.

Posted by: tsgauh | April 30, 2010 2:40 PM | [Report abuse](#)

so if immigration comes first and then climate second when does a jobs bill come?

Before or after Boehner becomes speaker?

No wait its immigration, climate, repeal of tanning salon tax and THEN a jobs bill.

Posted by: visionbrkr | April 30, 2010 2:46 PM | [Report abuse](#)

Why is there no commentary on how a legalized population of currently illegal immigrants would interface with our new PPACA health insurance reform? What would the cost estimate be?

These people would be mandated to carry health insurance and much of that insurance would need to be subsidized by the government.

Posted by: lancediverson | April 30, 2010 2:47 PM | [Report abuse](#)

If there is an abundance of low-wage jobs available and this abundance of jobs is causing criminal immigration behavior, wouldn't requiring welfare recipients to take such available jobs be a practical step?

It seems like a solution... it would cut the welfare expense and the immigration expense. Amnesty certainly isn't a solution: why would anyone want to pay both for the entitlements due the new pseudo-citizens and for the entitlements due existing welfare recipients?

A federal program could easily determine the number of agricultural and other workers needed and match this available pool of jobs to welfare recipients. The first time a welfare recipient refuses available work or fails to perform, all benefits cease. Relocation expenses could even be included in the program to make sure a welfare recipient could move closer to the workplace... perhaps even within walking distance. No more low-wage jobs to attract criminal immigrants and a greatly reduced welfare state -- perfect solution!

Posted by: rmgregory | April 30, 2010 3:07 PM | [Report abuse](#)

"By essentially barring the legal entry of low-skilled immigrant workers, our own government has created the conditions for an underground labor market, complete with smuggling and day-labor operations"

I disagree with this statement. By NOT diligently enforcing the laws against employing illegal immigrants, the federal government has rewarded employers for hiring the cheapest source of labor which they can. Look, if you run a landscaping business, are you gonna hire Hector for \$35/day (cash, no benefits, no SS, etc), or are you going to hire Bob at the required minimum wage, and file all of the required paperwork and pay benefits? If there's no downside to hiring Hector, that's what you're gonna do to maximize your profit. I see this all around us

in SoCal.

Also, there's this attitude that those who live in Mexico (or China or Brazil) don't listen to our politics or understand them. That's pretty arrogant. These folks are just as smart (and more desperate) than most of us, and any hint of "amnesty (or "path to citizenship") first" will lead to an uptick of folks trying to get here before enforcement is enhanced.

Posted by: Beagle1 | April 30, 2010 3:12 PM | [Report abuse](#)

"No wait its immigration, climate, repeal of tanning salon tax and THEN a jobs bill."

Wait a second...I thought the government couldn't create jobs? Only destroy them, something to that effect.

Posted by: y2josh_us | April 30, 2010 3:23 PM | [Report abuse](#)

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