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Illegal immigrants cost taxpayers nearly \$750 billion over lifetime: Report

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Deporting the country's estimated 11 million illegal immigrants would cost nearly \$125 billion, but allowing them to remain in the U.S. could cost taxpayers far more, according to a new report being released Thursday by a think tank that wants to see stricter immigration limits.

Steven A. Camarota, research director at the Center for Immigration Studies, crunched the numbers and found that the current population of illegal immigrants will drain nearly \$750 billion from taxpayers over their lifetimes — amounting to six times the deportation costs.

“Sometimes people say look, we couldn't deport everybody because it's prohibitively expensive,” Mr. Camarota said. “But if your only concern is fiscal cost, it's pretty clear that letting them stay is a hell of a lot more expensive.”

The researcher said he doesn't actually support a mass deportation of all illegal immigrants, but said it's important to spark a conversation about costs and benefits as President Trump vows to step up removals of illegal immigrants who already in the U.S.

The crux of Mr. Camarota's analysis is the nature of illegal immigrants, who are far more likely to be low-skilled, less-educated workers than the native-born population. Though they also don't have access to some services and benefits reserved for citizens and legal residents, they do get other benefits, such as education.

A report last year by the National Academy of Sciences helped put a dollar figure on the lifetime costs and benefits of immigrants, based on levels of education.

Mr. Camarota adjusted that study for illegal immigrants and concluded that those with advanced degrees are a \$424,000 boon to the U.S. over their lifetime, but those who dropped out of high school are a \$173,000 drain. Overall, it works out to a net cost to taxpayers of nearly \$63,000 per illegal immigrant.

Alex Nowrasteh, an immigration policy analyst at the Cato Institute, said that may not take into account the age of arrival. If an immigrant with less than a high school education arrives before age 24, he can often end up having a positive effect for taxpayers, the analyst said.

Mr. Camarota's study also focused only on fiscal calculations and did not account for economic effects such as how the drop in millions of low-skilled workers would affect certain industries, and thus Americans' wages and prices they pay.

A study last year by the American Action Forum concluded that deporting all illegal immigrants and stopping unauthorized newcomers would sap the economy of \$1 trillion.

The AAF also said the costs of deporting the universe of illegal immigrants would take 20 years and cost \$100 to \$300 billion — potentially much higher than Mr. Camarota's assumptions.

The AAF said the high estimate would happen if ICE has to send its fugitive operations teams out to arrest all of the illegal immigrants.

Mr. Camarota, though, took the average dollar amount for deportations in 2016 and put the cost at \$10,854 per person, or \$124.1 billion for the 11 million total. Using numbers from 2012, when authorities set a record for deportations while spending less, the total came to under \$6,000 per deportation, or \$67.6 billion for the total population.

Deportations have ticked up under President Trump, but the rise of sanctuary cities and of migrants choosing to fight their cases every step of the way in immigration courts is making each deportation more expensive as well.

Mr. Trump has asked for a surge in new detention beds to hold illegal immigrants, and for 1,000 new officers next year to boost the deportation force.

Acting Immigration and Customs Enforcement Director Thomas Homan told The Washington Times last week that his agency won't surpass the 2012 record for deportations this year, but "we're going to get there" in the future.