

Immigration Has Its Costs

by Kurt Williamsen

In speaking about immigration, people who advocate massive or unlimited immigration usually contend that immigrants make Americans wealthier because immigrants are a hardworking group who are not here for government handouts. These advocates add that immigrants do not take jobs from native workers and, in fact, create new jobs, benefiting all Americans. However, these claims are based on errors or misrepresentations.

To begin with, this argument assumes a high level of education among immigrants. A report by the pro-immigration Cato Institute, which favors unlimited immigration, states: "The proportion of immigrants with a bachelor degree or postgraduate degrees is higher than the proportion of the native labor force"; hence, we are told, the immigrants are beneficial because intelligent people are innovative and create jobs. But while this finding and conclusion are based on the U.S. maintaining a relatively steady flow of illegal immigrants of 250,000 to 300,000 per year from countries all over the world, the actual immigration rate is an estimated one to three million per year, mainly poor Hispanics. And even the Cato report



acknowledges that only 1.7 percent of immigrants from Mexico are in the "professional, executive, or manager" category. The report also ignores the fact that we get most of our well-educated immigrants through *legal* immigration.

Similarly, the Cato report contends that past large-scale immigration of poorly educated im-

migrants has not hurt native workers. It uses as proof the fact that cities with a large influx of immigrants did not experience any significant declines in the employment rates of minorities and high school dropouts (those who would compete directly with illegal immigrants for jobs). But this very well could have been a case of employers moving to areas with large amounts of low-wage workers. If immigration does not hurt native workers because, as some people are fond of saying, immigrants "take jobs that Americans won't do," the wage rates of natives should not be affected by immigration. In reality, according to the Center for Immigration Studies, "between 1989 and 1999, the real wages (adjusted for inflation) of workers who lack a high school education and work full-time year-round declined by 7.2 percent ... [while] wages ... of full-time, year-round workers who have completed high school rose 9 percent."

Approximately 8 percent of adult natives who work full-time are high school dropouts, but they make up approximately 26 percent "of full-time native workers living in poverty." The increased competition for jobs by immigrants is lowering or stagnating pay levels for them, virtually ensuring that the native poor will stay in poverty.

The pro-immigration lobby also errs in claiming that immigrants pay more to government in taxes than they use in government-provided services. In fact, large-scale waves of poor immigrants are devastating our country's coffers through their use of

means-tested programs (government handouts), causing hardships for Americans. Because low-wage workers qualify for most welfare programs and over 74 percent of illegal Mexican immigrants and their children are living in or near poverty, an inordinate percentage of them use welfare. Though the immigrants themselves are barred from using many of the welfare programs (not all), their U.S.-born children are immediately eligible to participate. "Whereas 14.8 percent of native households use at least one of the five major welfare programs, among households headed by an illegal alien from Mexico the figure is 24.9 percent," states the Center for Immigration Studies. These statistics are from 1999, before we added millions of poor Hispanics to our country's population. In 1999, over \$300 billion was spent on the welfare programs. Last year, over \$300 billion was spent on Medicaid alone.

Illegal immigrants from Mexico also received the Earned Income Tax Credit — which is not considered a welfare program — at a far higher rate than natives. "Persons receiving the EITC pay no federal income tax and instead receive cash assistance from the government based on their earnings and family size," states the Center for Immigration Studies. Over 49 percent of Mexican immigrants use the EITC versus about 13 percent for natives. In 1999, this program cost about \$39 billion. Also, U.S. law mandates that anyone who goes to an emergency room must be treated whether he pays or not. Estimates of the percentage of uninsured legal and illegal immigrants range from 32 percent and up. Heavy use of "free" medical care by immigrants drives up the cost of healthcare, meaning more low-income Americans can no longer afford health insurance. About \$3.6 billion a year is spent on incarcerating illegal immigrants in federal and state prisons, and many billions more are spent investigating and prosecuting their crimes. Add to that the \$28.6 billion that's spent each year to educate the children of illegal immigrants.

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