

Enforcement-Only Immigration Policies: Not Viable in a Modern Economy

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As many Americans express their outrage over Arizona's controversial law which attempts to drive immigrants out of the country, there are others who argue that the bill is a step in the right direction towards repairing the U.S. economy and taking back American jobs. However, patch work legislation by individual states is NOT actual immigration reform – it is a step backwards, in the wrong direction.

Despite studies which clearly show that comprehensive immigration reform will help the American economy, proponents of immigration bills like Arizona's insist on using the economic crisis as a way to stall actual reform. These proponents argue that undocumented workers are a drain on the U.S. economy; however, studies show that the losses in today's economy associated with an enforcement-only type of program such as the Arizona law are vast. The Perryman Group (TPG), an economic research and analysis firm which has been involved in hundreds of impact analyses and labor market studies over the past 25 years, reports that, for the U.S. as a whole, the immediate negative effects of eliminating the undocumented workforce would include an estimated **\$1.757 trillion** in annual lost spending, **\$651.511 billion** in annual lost output, and **8.1 million** lost jobs.

Individual states would also experience a substantial percentage of lost economic activity if the undocumented workforce were suddenly removed. These states notably include several along the US-Mexico border as well as others scattered around the country, including Wisconsin.

In fact, according to TPG studies, Wisconsin could face up to **\$84 billion** in lost expenditures, **\$3 billion** in lost gross product, **\$1 billion** in lost personal income, and over **40,000** in lost jobs.

Another claim that enforcement-only supporters make is that immigrants are taking the jobs of Americans. However, most Americans who make this argument would not want to endure the types of tasks that these workers perform on a daily basis. As U.S. citizens become more educated and skilled, they also become less willing to take on these types of jobs. Also, as the domestic workforce becomes older, more stable in number, and better educated, U.S. production increasingly requires foreign, low-skilled workers. In 1960, about 50% of men in this country joined the low-skilled labor force without completing high school, but now this number is less than 10% and shortages in the low-skilled labor force will only continue to escalate.

Additionally, if all undocumented workers were removed from the workforce, a number of industries such as construction and agriculture would face substantial shortages of workers. Furthermore, Americans would be induced into the labor pool, forced to do jobs that they have no interest in, or be provided with incentives to take jobs far below their current education and skill levels. As a result of this scenario, substantial increases in wages would likely be necessary, thus reducing the United States' competitiveness in a global market.

It is crucial that any sensible immigration policy recognize the basic and inescapable reality that the resources provided by immigrant workers are absolutely essential to the modern U.S. economy. It is time to realize that complacency and "band-aid" tactics are ineffective. Comprehensive immigration reform is essential to this country's future.

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