

# Social security or medicare benefits and the notion of endowing them with america...

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The passage of a new immigration law in Arizona has reinvigorated the national debate over the status of undocumented workers in the United States. In 2010, Arizona Governor Jan Brewer signed S. B. 1070 into law, which empowers law enforcement authorities to stop and question any individual they have reasonable suspicion of being an illegal alien. Anyone who cannot produce proof of residency status is subject to apprehension and deportation. The controversial Arizona legislation has raised concerns over racial profiling and other forms of police abuse, but of greater significance is the precedent for eroding what even the Internal Revenue Service considers a productive “ segment” of the nation’s working population. Ultimately, Arizona’s aim is to bring the number of illegal immigrants in the state under control, but if S. B. 1070 sets a national precedent (other states have also enacted immigration laws), government officials and sociologists argue that the U. S. economy will be the biggest loser.

At present, it is estimated that there are about 500, 000 undocumented aliens in the state of Arizona, and that activities resulting from S. B. 1070 have removed about 100, 000 from the state (Gray, 2010). If this trend continues, projections are that the loss of so many low-income workers could cost the state more than \$20 billion (Ibid). Projected onto the national stage, and considering how integral undocumented workers have become, the widespread and indiscriminate suppression of illegal aliens nationwide would deliver an economic blow that the

U. S. simply cannot sustain. The only workable solution is to establish an ambitious guest worker program that would formalize the presence of alien workers in the U. S. and provide them a pathway to earning citizenship

status.

Concerns over illegal workers using state services without paying taxes helped provide the impetus for S. B. 1070. This fear lies near the heart of the issue at the national level, with politicians and political observers arguing that the situation will place such pressure on America's social service system that native-born Americans will be adversely affected in the long run.

Conservative factions in Washington, and among the states, have long argued that the only way to protect Americans is to remove all undocumented aliens. However, the Immigration Policy Center (IPC) released a study in 2010, which concluded that undocumented workers generate as much as five percent of the nation's economy (Fahmy, 2010). IPC representative Wendy Sefsaf said the facts do not support the call to purge the nation of undocumented workers. "Illegal immigrants are good for our economy," she said. "They make our labor force and our economy bigger. Sure, you could kick them all out, but then you would have to shrink the economy" (Ibid).

What is more, the IRS reports that illegal alien workers contribute substantially to the Social Security tax roles, which controverts the assertion that the presence of an undocumented work force is harmful to the U. S. from an economic standpoint. In fact, studies have shown that two-thirds of undocumented aliens support Social Security and Medicare with their taxes, in addition to paying payroll taxes (Gray, 2010). Unfortunately, these workers are not eligible for

citizenship is all too often out of the question, with the result that immigrant families are frequently torn apart. A guest worker program would offer a more humane alternative to current Draconian measures and provide foreign workers access to benefits and services from which they are at present excluded.

The irrefutability of those facts that bolster the case for a guest worker initiative have been acknowledged by political leaders on both sides of the ideological divide. Former President George W. Bush, Arizona Sen. John McCain and the late Massachusetts Sen. Ted Kennedy all espoused and embraced proposals for various guest worker proposals in the spirit of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (Hing, 2006). One of the most important objectives to be achieved is to alter the long-standing tendency among Americans to see the undocumented alien as somehow subhuman, unworthy of the same rights and opportunities as naturalized Americans. This is rendered all the more important given that the economic presence undocumented workers - particularly Hispanic workers - have established in the U. S. is only apt to increase. “ Given the economic imbalance between the (United States and Mexico), we know that the flow will continue - legally or otherwise” (Ibid). The only way to transform the image of undocumented workers from faceless rabble to worthy citizens is to begin to empower them through a guest worker initiative that rewards their hard work and dedication with full and legal citizenship.

Another popular misconception is that the introduction of alien workers into the labor force will steal jobs away from Americans. This belief, with its

xenophobic roots is quite likely the most persistent and most difficult to overcome. Studies have shown that undocumented workers are willing to perform manual, low-income jobs that most Americans would be reluctant to take on. As well, it appears that illegal alien workers have less impact on the American economy than factors such as automation in manufacturing industries and the increase in global trade (Davidson, 2006). Harvard economist George Borjas has determined that undocumented workers, in fact, have a positive effect (albeit a small one) on the average American, who derives an approximate one percent annual increase from the labors of illegal workers (Ibid).

In light of the evidence, it seems logical to presume that the average American would benefit far more from fully enfranchised foreign workers. An effective guest worker program must empower laborers to purchase homes, drive a car and see that their children are well-educated if they are to function adequately. However, without a pathway to full citizenship, such a program would amount to little more than indentured servitude. And American employers, who must deal with a transitory and uncertain work force, would benefit materially from a comprehensive guest worker program. “Once you’re able to provide more certain legal status, it allows greater certainty for both the employee and the employer,” said Lee Culpepper, chief lobbyist for the National Restaurant Association. “(Illegal employees) may be reluctant to report any type of workplace violations or exercise their rights” (Sharp, Davidson & Kenworthy, 2004). Stability for employers and foreign employees would be among the most important benefits of a guest worker program, with positive ramifications for the American economy. As

such, it is vital that the United States establish a guest worker program if it is to keep pace with, and take advantage of, the dynamics of an expanding labor force.

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