

Illegal Immigration: If You Demand (Cheap Labor) They Will Come

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U.S. immigration policy is confusing. On one hand, it says stop illegal immigration; on the other hand, it does not make any serious effort to solve illegal immigration problems. For many years, people have been crossing the border into the U.S. freely and illegally. Not many U.S. citizens were concerned about it when the number of illegal immigrations was small, jobs were plentiful, social services were abundant, and the economy was vibrant. In the early 80's, the number of illegal immigrations was getting larger and the conditions were not as rosy as they used to be. U.S. citizens started to pay attention to illegal immigration issues.

On November 6, 1986, President Ronald Reagan signed the Simpson-Mazzoli Reform and Control Act to impose sanctions against employers who hired illegal immigrants and to grant amnesty to many illegal immigrants ([“Immigration: Key Dates”](#)). Those plans did not work as expected. Mexico could not control its unemployment problem. U.S. businesses were still attracted to cheap labor. People still hired illegal immigrants for heavy duty work. Now, there were more illegal immigrants crossing the border than ever. On November 8, 1994, California passed Prop 187, which barred illegal immigrants from receiving certain state benefits. The law was struck down by the courts ([“Immigration: Key Dates”](#)). There have been many attempts to slow down illegal immigration, but it seems the effort went nowhere.

Employers were more interested in enhancing their company's bottom lines and impressing shareholders than listening to other people's complaints here in the U.S. Employers kept hiring illegal immigrants through third party employment agencies. They “unknowingly” used loopholes or put blame on the third party to avoid penalties when caught. Lawmakers were so worried about getting re-elected and being politically correct that they turned a blind eye and deaf ear to illegal immigration issues. Illegal immigrants got jobs, made money, and sent home billions. The illegal immigrants were happy. The Mexican government was happy. However, the U.S. workers were facing unemployment.

NAFTA and outsourcing have made the matter even worse by taking many jobs away from U.S. workers - blue collar workers and white collar workers alike. By the late 90's, the focus on illegal

immigration issues intensified, but went nowhere. As James Carville would say “It’s the economy, stupid.” Then came September 11th 2001.

Under the name of national security, the anti-illegal immigration movement gained momentum. On April 1, 2006, the Minuteman project was born to police illegal immigrants crossing the border and to bring them to the Border Patrol (“[Immigration: Key Dates](#)”). Segments of wall along the U.S. and Mexico border were built at popular entry point to slow down illegal immigration. On May 15, 2006, President Bush announced that he would send 6,000 national guardsmen to the Mexican border to assist the Border Patrol (“[Immigration: Key Dates](#)”). However, illegal immigrants started to enter the U.S. through remote areas.

Thousands of illegal immigrants have died because of the scorching heat in the desert since the year 2000 ([Cornelius](#)). The problem became worse as a result of the Minuteman Project. Last year alone, “there were 516 bodies discovered in the desert” (“[Dying to Get In](#)”). However, there was another group of people at the border who provided first aid and water to the illegal immigrants. They also left barrels of water throughout remote areas in the desert for the illegal immigrants.

Nobody really had a clear direction as how to solve the problem of illegal immigration. There was no concerted effort. In the meantime, the number of illegal immigrants in the U.S. kept increasing by the millions. Citizens pressure for anti-illegal immigration kept building up, forcing President Bush to pass the law to build a 700-mile-wall at the U.S.-Mexican border. As a sign of diffuse momentum, he did not pinpoint where the money would come from to build the wall.

Illegal immigration is a serious problem. The Minuteman Project, building walls, and increasing national guards at the border are just short term solutions. Unless there is a sound plan to solve the demand for cheap labor, the problem is here to stay.

Illegal immigrants provide U.S. businesses something which is difficult for U.S. workers to compete with: cheap labor. Industries like meat packing, restaurants, hospitals, construction, agriculture, and nursing homes are hungry for cheap labor ([McNatt](#)). Big corporations such as Wal-Mart and Tyson Foods are desperately seeking cheap labor ([Cornelius](#)). Employers hire millions of illegal immigrants to satisfy the

shortage of non-skilled or low-skilled labor through third party employment agencies. Cheap labor is vital to the economy.

Cheap labor would help employers stay competitive, enhance the bottom line, and even to survive in business. The cheap labor factor also indirectly helps to make products and services more affordable. Any short supply of cheap labor from illegal immigrants would cause an economic disruption to businesses (Cornelius). Mr. Wayne Cornelius in Controlling 'Unwanted' Immigration: Lessons from the United States writes:

In 1998, immigration authority investigated 103 meat-packing plants in the state of Nebraska . . . were found to have used questionable Social Security numbers in applying for their job. Immigration agents selected 3,135 of these workers to be interviewed, but 2,149 quit their jobs before agents arrived at the workplace. Only 1,040 workers were interview, and in the end only 34 unauthorised workers were arrested and expelled from the country. Complaints by employer groups, community organizations, local politicians and members of Congress led the Clinton administration to call off Operation Vanguard.(787)

Illegal immigration's cheap labor is so important to the economy that U.S. government officials have to stop enforcing immigration law and let illegal immigrants, who use fake identifications, continue working. The U.S. government is sending a very confusing signal to potential immigrants.

Illegal immigrants pay taxes and social security, but they do not claim the money by the end of the tax year because they use fake documents, i.e. fake social security and fake green cards, to work (McNatt). The U.S. Social Security Administration estimates the unclaimed amount is between six to seven billion dollars a year (McNatt). Six to seven billion dollars can be used to cover important things such as a portion of the cost of hospital bills or tuition for undocumented children (McNatt). As home owners or renters, many undocumented immigrants also contribute to real estate taxes, which are the sources of funding for local governments and school systems (McNatt).

The goal of the majority of illegal immigrants coming to the U.S. is to work hard, make money, and send home the money. Life in their home country is hard. Money is scarce. They are unable to find jobs in their country. They need to come here to work so that they can send money home to take care of their families.

Their determination to come here and work is strong. One illegal construction worker, who was deported, said: “I will be going back in 15 days. I need to work. The jobs in Mexico don’t pay anything” (Barlett and Steele). Even with the risk of death from the scorching heat killing thousands in the desert since 2000, they keep coming by the millions. Illegal immigrants need the U.S. for jobs as much as the U.S. needs them for cheap labor. No sound plan to maximize the benefits of the circumstances is like swimming upstream against the current. Walls can be built and be removed. Governments come and go. The spirit of taking care of family will last forever. After all, President John F. Kennedy once said: “We are a nation of immigrants.”

People against illegal immigration fear that the Mexicans are going to re-conquer the Southwest: “Reconquista of the Southwest” (Jeffery and Ryskind). On April 15, 2006, hundreds of thousands of pro-immigration protesters marched through the streets of Los Angeles, California, and Phoenix, Arizona. The protesters carried Mexican Flags. They made anti-illegal immigration supporters nervous and provided ammunition to anti-immigration supporters who would claim that illegal immigration has begun an uncontrolled demographic and cultural transformation of the United States, threatening its values (Tumuty).

Opponents claim that based on the census, there are six million Hispanics who do not disclose where they come from (Jeffery and Ryskind). The anti-illegal immigration supporters cried that 58% of Mexicans in the Southwest believe that the area belongs to them (Jeffery and Ryskind). The opponents used that excuse to push their agenda further. In reality, Mexicans are fun loving and hard working people. There is not a single “Reconquista” organization known to the public or known to the U.S. government. There may be a few radical individuals who speak their minds and express frustration to “re-conquer” the Southwest but there is no organized effort.

In order to deny social services to the illegal immigrants, they suggested not granting automatic citizenship to children, called anchor babies, born to illegal immigrants (Jeffery and Ryskind). These anchor babies are a potential burden on American society. They could be recipients of future social welfare benefits and free education (Jeffery and Ryskind). The opponents may have a point. However, denying U.S.-born children U.S. citizenship is unconstitutional.

Opponents also believe that the illegal immigrants are a threat to the nation's economy. They claim that illegal immigration costs the U.S. ten billion dollars a year at the federal level and exhausts state funding of such programs as education, welfare benefits, and medical care (Haerens). There may be some truth to the opponents' claims. However, ten-billion-dollars compared to the U.S.'s trillion-dollar Gross National Product (GNP) is a drop in the bucket. The monetary issue does not rise to the level of a "threat to the nation's economy." In fact, the illegal immigrants help to make products and services more affordable for the average American person. For example, the price of hotel rooms where Americans stay and the cost of fruits and vegetables that Americans consume are low and affordable. Without the cheap labor of illegal immigrants, the prices would be higher, which would have a negative impact on the average American consumers' buying power.

For national security of the U.S., control of the border is a must. Terrorists may not be seen at the border now, but they may be observing and studying the movements of the illegal immigrants crossing the border and learn how to blend in with the huge number of illegal immigrants crossing the border. We can not sleep on this and wait for another 9/11 to happen.

Co-operating with the Mexican government is essential to national security. Mexico must have a stable government and maintain goodwill toward the U.S. The U.S. started losing its influence in Latin America. As a result, many Latin American countries voted for communists as their presidents: Evo Morales of Bolivia, Daniel Ortega of Nicaragua, and Luiz Inácio Lula Da Silva of Brazil. Having a leftist president in Mexico pounding a table and challenging U.S. policy as Hugo Chavez did is not in the U.S.'s best interests.

For economic and national security reasons, control of the border should be the number one priority and this cannot be done alone by any single entity. It needs co-operation from many different parties, including both state and federal, and Mexico's government. Building walls and setting up work programs with employers are important in controlling the border effort. Building walls and increasing border patrol agents discourage crossing the border illegally. Walls force illegal immigrants to look for other options. However, the guest worker program is another option.

Work programs should provide opportunities to satisfy the U.S. demand for cheap labor without violating the law. Employers should set up employment offices at cities in Mexico where the most illegal immigrants originate, interview, collect personal information, finger print, and index the data. Once immigrants (who must be citizens of their country a minimum of five years) are hired, they are labor contractors. They can live and work in the U.S., while applying for green cards. After five years, they can get green cards if they have stable jobs and behave well. After five years of holding a green card, they can apply for citizenship. Since guest workers are contractors, their income is subject to U.S. and their country's taxes, which would provide some incentive for the Mexican government to cooperate.

Work programs should not be amnesty programs. Work programs would offer immigrants ways to work legally in the U.S. to satisfy the need for cheap labor while waiting for their immigration paperwork to be processed. Work programs would also offer unique opportunities for immigrants to learn American's language and culture. Based on an estimate, there are approximately 12 million illegal immigrants in the U.S. (Jeffery and Ryskind). The U.S. government does not know where they are in the U.S. and what country they came from. The guest worker program would provide an incentive for them to come out and participate in the programs. Otherwise, they may face a stiff price for being caught and deported in the future, which is more severe than coming out to participate.

The guest worker quota would be increased for neighboring countries to meet the demand in the U.S. The guest worker program would satisfy the need for jobs and the demand for cheap labor. Penalties for employers who hire illegal immigrants must be severe and be enforced to create heavy opportunity cost for

those not using a legal guest worker program. The loophole of “un-knowingly” hiring illegal immigrants through third party employment agencies should be closed.

Since guest workers are contractors, they should not be subject to social welfare programs. They could and should purchase short term disability insurance. They could and should pay school tuition and healthcare insurance for their children from their own pockets. Children born to contractors should be treated as foreign diplomat children born in the U.S and should not become U.S. citizens automatically. Guest worker criminals should serve time here in a prison system like Arizona sheriff Joe Arpaio’s prison system before being deported back to their own countries. Guest workers should work and live in an environment that “respects labor rights and human dignity” ("[The U.S.-Mexico Border](#)").

In addition to building walls and setting up work programs, the U.S. government should set up a comprehensive program to offer financial support and opportunities for U.S workers to learn new skills or to hone their existing skills, so that they can compete in the job market with foreigners. Without having a comprehensive program, the quality of life in the U.S. is going to suffer and tension between U.S. citizens and immigrants will intensify. As a result, American democracy will be jeopardized.

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