

Top 10 Falsehoods *Regarding Comprehensive Immigration Reform*

While espousing a failed, enforcement-only strategy that offers no solutions to the problems facing our broken immigration system, opponents are attacking a comprehensive proposal that would make our immigration system safe, legal, orderly and controlled. These attacks grossly mischaracterize this measure, the Secure America and Orderly Immigration Act (S.1033/H.R. 2330).

Falsehood # 1: By enforcing the laws already on the books we can fix our broken immigration system.

The truth: No. Enforcing our current severely dysfunctional system will bring only more dysfunction. In fact, our failed enforcement policies offer glaring evidence that more enforcement is not the solution. During the past decade, we tripled the number of agents on the border, quintupled their budget, toughened our enforcement strategies, and heavily fortified urban entry points. Yet, during the same time period there have been record levels of illegal immigration, porous borders, a cottage industry created for smugglers and document forgers, and tragic deaths in our deserts.

Enforcement will work only when our laws make sense and reflect our security and economic needs and the importance of reunifying families. Such realistic laws, by establishing legal migration channels, will limit the enforcement targets so that we focus our resources on those who mean to do us harm, not on those who are filling our labor market needs or reuniting with their close family members. Our current immigration policy exhibits the same fundamental flaws we saw with laws enacted during Prohibition. It's not realistic, it doesn't reflect our needs, and it makes good, law-abiding individuals into lawbreakers. In short, it's bad policy.

S. 1033/H.R. 2330 would make legality the norm and restore legitimacy to the law. This will help us to differentiate between the law-abiders and the law-breakers and will allow for a more efficient allocation of enforcement resources.

Falsehood # 2: This proposal will lead to more illegal immigration.

The truth: No it will not. Comprehensive immigration reform would replace the current illegal flow with a legal flow. Programs that would match willing essential workers with willing employers, reduce the backlogs on family immigration, and offer people the opportunity to earn their permanent legal status would eliminate incentives to skirt our immigration laws. Such programs would create a safe, legal, and orderly avenue for those who seek employment in the U.S as well as those who seek to reunify with family members. With these alternatives in place, immigrants would eschew dangerous border crossings in favor of a safe, controlled visa process. And because this bill mandates that people must be residing in this country by the date of its introduction to be eligible, this measure would not function as a magnet for others.

Comprehensive reform also would end the incentive to hire undocumented workers. Employers who still resort to using illegal workers could be targeted with tough new penalties. Under the new plan, employers would be able to verify electronically that a foreign worker is authorized to work. Any employer who participates in the program would be required to use this system, with stiff fines levied on employers who knowingly violate immigration or labor laws. This verification system also would include safeguards to ensure that employers do not

discriminate against job applicants, and would allow workers to verify personal information and appeal to the government to address any inaccuracies in the system.

S. 1130/H.R. 2330 also would focus resources at our borders, providing for better technology and a process by which the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) can monitor and address changing border enforcement needs. The bill specifically targets efforts to combat human smuggling and increases coordination and information sharing among officials responsible for border control.

Falsehood # 3: This proposal is really an “amnesty” for illegal immigrants.

The truth: This proposal is nothing of the sort. Opponents of immigration reform assign the emotionally charged label of “amnesty” to all practical proposals because they have no proposal of their own other than more enforcement of a dysfunctional system. In fact, the Secure America and Orderly Immigration Act is far from an amnesty. Rather, it creates a more orderly system of rules and penalties to replace the current system of chaos. Under this measure, immigrants must register, get in the back of the line for citizenship, and follow the rules or they will be sent home.

S.1330/H.R. 2330 recognizes that most Americans believe it is unrealistic to deport the eleven million undocumented immigrants living and working in our country – and that we must act in the national interest to deal with this underground community. The bill requires the undocumented to come forward, register, pay a substantial fine, and meet a prospective work requirement before they can apply for a permanent visa. Only those who pass rigorous background and security screening and prove they are learning English will be eligible to apply.

Falsehood # 4: Isn't this proposal unfair to those who are patiently waiting in line?

The truth: No. This proposal does not allow anyone to “cut in line.” One of the priorities of this measure is to decrease the family backlogs to allow families to reunify in a timely manner. One symptom of our current failed policies is that families can be separated for many years. Immigrants without papers already living in the United States will go to the back of the line. After first registering for temporary admission they must work for six years before they can earn the opportunity to permanently adjust their status.

Falsehood # 5: Comprehensive immigration reform will take jobs away from American workers.

The truth: A comprehensive reform plan will help immigrant workers fill jobs that are currently going unfilled because the large majority of Americans are over-qualified and are unwilling to take these jobs. While 27.3% of the foreign-born age 25 and over held a bachelor's degree or more in 2003, many less educated immigrants come to the U.S. because there is a high demand for workers in important sectors of our economy.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, among the 20 occupations expected to experience the largest job growth during the 2002-2012 period, 14 will require only short-term on-the-job training (not a high school or college education): salespersons, food preparation and serving workers, cashiers, janitors, waiters and waitresses, nursing aides, receptionists, security guards, office clerks, teacher assistants, home health aides, personal and home care aides, truck drivers, and groundskeepers. Overall, 57.7 percent of total job openings in the 2002-2012 period will be in occupations that require only short-term or moderate-term on-the-job training. Given that native-born workers are more likely than immigrants to have a high school diploma, vocational

training, or several years of college – and that the native-born population is rapidly growing older as the baby boomers reach retirement age and birthrates decline – less-skilled immigrants are needed to fill these positions.

It also is important to note that there is no correlation between increased immigration and the displacement of U.S. workers. A study by economists Richard Vedder, Lowell Gallaway, and Stephen Moore found that states with relatively high immigration actually experience low unemployment. The economists believe that immigration likely opens up many job opportunities for natives. They wrote, “First, immigrants may expand the demand for goods and services through their consumption. Second, immigrants may contribute to output through the investment of savings they bring with them. Third, immigrants have high rates of entrepreneurship, which may lead to the creation of new jobs for U.S. workers. Fourth, immigrants may fill vital niches in the low and high skilled ends of the labor market, thus creating subsidiary job opportunities for Americans. Fifth, immigrants may contribute to economies of scale in production and the growth of markets.”¹ Rather than cost American workers their jobs, immigration and comprehensive immigration reform, will help create jobs.

Falsehood # 6: This proposal will lead to wage depression for U.S. workers.

The truth: By creating legal channels for foreign workers, this measure will buoy the wages and working conditions of U.S. workers. Currently, some undocumented workers are forced to accept submarket wages and working conditions because their status makes them vulnerable and unable to protect themselves against unscrupulous employers. By according them legal status, the Secure America and Orderly Immigration Act will put them on the same footing with employers as native-born workers.

In addition, by creating a legal guest worker program with tough enforcement provisions, the bill will help to reduce unfair competition, as temporary workers and newly legalized immigrants enjoy the same freedoms and protections as do native-born workers.

Studies also have shown that those lesser-skilled U.S. citizen workers who compete most closely with lesser skilled immigrant workers experience very little downward pressure on their wages. It is estimated that a 10% increase in the share of foreign born workers reduce natives’ wages by less than 1%. Recent history drives this point home. During the 1990s boom, a period of high immigration, real wages rose across the income scale (and the national unemployment rate fell below 4%) – including for the poorest 20% of American households.

Falsehood # 7: We tried something like this proposal before, in 1986. We shouldn’t go down this path again.

The truth: This proposal in fact differs dramatically from what we tried in 1986. The 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) focused only on symptoms, the undocumented population, not the cause: an immigration system that did not reflect the needs of U.S. businesses and families. IRCA did not create any legal channels for future workers or family members while creating an enforcement regime that was bound to fail. The effectiveness of enforcement policies is directly linked to the rationality of the underlying rules.

¹ Richard Vedder, Lowell Gallaway, and Stephen Moore, *Immigration and Unemployment: New Evidence*, Alexis de Tocqueville Institution, Arlington, VA (Mar. 1994) at p. 13.

The Secure America and Orderly Immigration Act addresses both the symptoms and the cause, combining legal future channels with tough enforcement and border provisions, along with a path to permanent legal status for those already here and working.

Falsehood # 8: Terrorists could use this new visa program to enter the U.S.

The truth: Individuals granted visas under this comprehensive reform proposal would face stringent security checks. Their identities, photos, and fingerprints will be checked against watch lists and criminal databases. From a security perspective, this is a vastly superior alternative to our current system which actually opens avenues for terrorists to exploit. This dysfunctional system has spawned a robust human smuggling trade which terrorists could tap into for entry into the U.S. Moreover, our failed policies have forced large numbers of people into a shadow culture, with some having to rely on fraudulent documents for their survival. That reality, in turn, has fueled a burgeoning black market in fraudulent documents.

The Secure America and Orderly Immigration Act will help shut down the human smuggling and fraud industries whose existence depends on those who, out of desperation, come to this country by any means in search of a better life. By funneling these workers into legal and secure channels, the market for these nefarious industries will shrink, thereby denying terrorists access to resources they need to maneuver freely. This proposal also would encourage those already here to come forward to be reviewed by our government.

The truth of the matter is that finding terrorists is like finding a needle in a haystack. A smart comprehensive immigration reform plan that separates hardworking individuals from those who mean to do us harm will help shrink that haystack and make America safer.

Falsehood # 9: Americans don't support this kind of reform.

The truth: A recent survey of likely voters found that there is overwhelming and intense support for comprehensive reform that includes the following components:

- Registers undocumented workers as temporary guest workers,
- Provides temporary work visas for seasonal and temporary workers,
- Provides newly registered workers with a multi-year process for legal residency and eventual citizenship,
- Provides newly registered workers with no preferential treatment for citizenship,
- Provides tougher penalties for workers or employers who violate these laws, and
- Puts a priority on reuniting close family members.

Support for this proposal is solid across party lines: 78% of Republicans, 77% of Independents, and 70% of Democrats are supportive; and regional lines: 77% of Red State voters, 79% of Blue State voters, and, 72% of Purple State voters are supportive; and demographic lines; and 78% of whites, 67% of African Americans, and 70% of Hispanics are supportive. In addition, More than three-in-four likely voters agree on these statements framing the immigration reform debate:

- o "The immigration system is broken and needs to be fixed."
- o "If an immigrant has been in this country working, paying taxes, and learning English, there should be a way for them to become a citizen."
- o "Fixing our immigration system to make it safe, legal, and orderly will make us more secure from terrorists."

Falsehood # 10: Immigrants are a drain on our economy.

The truth: On the contrary, our economy is “highly dependent on immigration, legal and illegal, temporary and permanent,” according to a 2004 report issued by the Chicago Council of Foreign Relations. Another 2004 report notes that “the challenge facing the American workforce in the coming 20 years” is that “we will not have enough people to fill it.”

A comprehensive 1997 report issued by the National Academy of Sciences reinforces the positive impact of immigration on our economy. This study concluded that immigrants benefit the U.S. economy overall, have little negative effect on the income and job opportunities of most native-born Americans, and annually may add as much as \$10 billion to the economy. As a result, the report concluded, most Americans enjoy a healthier economy because of the increased supply of labor and lower prices resulting from immigration.

Additionally, in a poll of eminent economists conducted by the CATO Institute in the mid-1980s and updated in 1990, 81 percent of the respondents opined that, on balance, twentieth-century immigration has had a “very favorable” effect on U.S. economic growth. The Cato Institute also concluded in a 1997 study that immigrant households paid an estimated \$133 billion in direct taxes to federal, state, and local governments. The message from those who are charged with crunching the numbers is simple: immigration is good for our economy.