

The Fiscal Bottom Line on Immigration Reform

The Costs of Enforcement-Only and the Benefits of Comprehensive Reform

Tax Day is an appropriate time to take stock of a few fiscal bottom lines about immigration enforcement and immigration reform. The federal government spends billions of taxpayer dollars every year on border and interior enforcement measures intended to deter unauthorized immigration. While these efforts have failed to solve the problem of unauthorized immigration, they have had a negative impact on American families, communities, and the economy. Were the United States to adopt a different approach by implementing comprehensive immigration reform, the legalization of currently unauthorized immigrants alone would generate billions of dollars in additional tax revenue as their wages and tax contributions increase over time.

Moreover, enforcement resources could be focused on finding individuals who are actually a threat to national security or public safety, rather than pursuing unauthorized job seekers and people trying to reunite with family members in the United States. Conversely, trying to remove roughly 11 million unauthorized immigrants from the country would waste hundreds of billions of taxpayer dollars.

We spend huge sums of taxpayer money on immigration enforcement...

- Since Fiscal Year (FY) 2004, the budgets of U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)—the border-enforcement and interior-enforcement components of Department of Homeland Security (DHS)—have increased dramatically. CBP's budget grew from [\\$6 billion](#) [1] in FY 2004 to [\\$11.4 billion](#) [2] in FY 2010, while ICE's budget increased from [\\$3.7 billion](#) [1] to [\\$5.7 billion](#) [2] over the same period.
- Since FY 2005, Congress has allocated [\\$2.4 billion](#) [3] to build fences along the southwest border—and another [\\$1.1 billion](#) [3] to build a high-tech network of cameras and sensors known as "SBInet." However, there is no evidence that the fences actually deter unauthorized immigrants, and SBInet has been plagued by technical glitches, shoddy testing, and missed deadlines since its inception. On March 16, 2010, Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano [froze](#) [4] SBInet funding, pending the outcome of a comprehensive review of the program.
- Based on figures from the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, a fence along all 2,000 miles of the southwest border would cost *at least* [\\$2.5 billion](#) [5] to build, plus anywhere from [\\$33 billion](#) [5] to [\\$140 billion](#) [5] to maintain over the following two-and-a-half decades, depending upon how many breaches the fencing sustains which must be repaired.

...yet unauthorized immigrants have not been deterred from coming to the United States when there are jobs available.

- A research team led by Wayne Cornelius, Director of the Center for Comparative Immigration Studies at the University of California, San Diego, has found that while unauthorized migrants from Mexico may be caught on their first attempt at crossing the border, they have an [almost 100 percent](#) [6] chance of eventual success—particularly if they enlist the services of a *coyote*, or people smuggler. Moreover, as border enforcement is tightened *between* ports of entry along the southwest border, more migrants are being smuggled *through* ports of entry (sealed in a compartment within a vehicle, or as a passenger with false or borrowed documents).

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- Legalizing unauthorized immigrants would increase tax revenue.**

- The alternative to legalization—deportation—would be a monumental waste of taxpayer dollars.**

- To read more on the economic impact of immigration on the state and local level, read:**

- [Assessing the Economic Impact of Immigration at the State and Local Level](#) [10] (IPC Fact Check, April 13, 2010)

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- Just the Facts
- Economics of Immigration
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[1] http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/Budget_BIB-FY2006.pdf#page=20

[2] http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/budget_bib_fy2011.pdf#page=24

[3] <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d091013t.pdf#page=2>

[4] http://www.dhs.gov/ynews/releases/pr_1268769368466.shtml

[5] http://assets.opencrs.com/rpts/RL33659_20090316.pdf#page=31

[6]

<http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/.../default/files/docs/MigrationCornelius060809.pdf%2523page%3D44>

[71]

<http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/.../default/files/docs/Hinojosa%20-%20Raising%20the%20Floor%20for%20American%20Workers%20010710.pdf%2523page%3D15>

[8] http://csii.usc.edu/documents/economic_benefits_immigrant_authorization.pdf#page=3

[9] http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2010/03/pdf/cost_of_deportation.pdf#page=6

[10]

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<http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/../../../../just-facts/assessing-economic-impact-immigration-state-and-local-level>

[11] http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/docs/Fiscal_Bottom_Line_041310.pdf