

Allow Immigrants Full Access to the American Economy

As with the free movement of goods and services across borders, the legally unencumbered movement of people reaps net benefits for all parties concerned. Congress should enhance the benefits of immigration by implementing less restrictive immigration laws, with the ultimate goal of an immigration system that lets non-criminal, non-terrorist, and healthy immigrants from anywhere in the world move to the United States.

Government should have no more control over the flow of people across borders than the flow of capital, goods, and services. Only an unfettered free market in laborers and entrepreneurs can operate without distorting the economy. As in all other areas of the economy, price signals, opportunity and transactions costs, and the interplay of other economic forces will determine the number and quality of immigrants.

The standard argument in favor of our current restrictive immigration laws—that such laws are necessary for security and to protect American workers from an influx of cheap foreign competition—do not hold up to scrutiny. Immigration critics charge that immigrants, regardless of lawful status, depress the wages of American workers. At the most, this is true for a small subset of the American population that competes directly with foreign labor. But for the vast majority of Americans, freer immigra-

tion would result in an increase in their wages and returns on investments. This is because the skills immigrants possess tend to complement the skills of American workers. Except in the most menial of jobs, immigrant and American workers are rarely substitutes for each other.

Immigrants are also entrepreneurial. According to the Kauffman Foundation, immigrants are 60 percent more likely to be self-employed than native-born Americans. The benefits of immigrant entrepreneurship spill over into the rest of the American economy, creating employment opportunities for Americans and greater profits for many American service industries, like accounting, financial services, and the legal professions. Failure to reform America's immigration policy risks denying entrance to entrepreneurs like Google co-founder Sergey Brin, who came to the U.S. from the Soviet Union as a child.

Congress should free immigration authorities to focus on security. America's immigration authorities are stretched thin raiding workplaces, checking permits, and screening clearly non-violent people for entrance. Congress should move the immigration system away from work permits and back toward a system that only excludes criminals, terrorists, or those carrying serious, deadly, and highly contagious diseases. In the meantime, Congress should:

- Lift all quotas for work visas.
- Allow employees, rather than employers, to hold work visas.
- Allow visa holders to change jobs without government approval.
- Allow visas to be issued for an unlimited period of time, subject to revocation if the visa holder commits a serious felony.

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