

Allow Immigrants to Help Fill America's Need for Workers

Congress should implement more flexible, less restrictive immigration laws, with the ultimate goal of an immigration system that lets law-abiding workers from anywhere fill any job an employer wishes to give them. Measures that move towards comprehensive immigration reform tend to forward such a system.

The detrimental effects of freer immigration are illusory. The standard arguments in favor of restrictive immigration laws—that such laws are necessary to secure the nation's borders and to protect American workers from an influx of cheap foreign laborers—do not hold up to scrutiny.

Immigration critics charge that undocumented workers depress wages. But that is because they are undocumented, which forces them underground. Allowing workers to enter the country legally would protect American workers' wages. In addition, by helping ensure that workers enter the United States legally, a more liberal immigration policy helps enhance control of the border.

Freer immigration would also stem abuse by unscrupulous employers who threaten foreign workers with deportation, by allowing the workers to change jobs.

Meanwhile, even in this economy, some employers still report that they are unable to find

American workers willing and able to take jobs they need filled. They say that they need foreign workers to take these jobs, and that if they cannot hire foreign workers, they will have to shrink or shut their businesses.

Congress should lift caps on hiring guest workers. The United States has two major guest worker programs.

- The H-2A visa allows an unlimited number of foreign workers to be employed as seasonal or temporary agricultural workers in the U.S. It is valid for up to one year, and may be extended for up to three years. H-2A workers may not transfer from one employer to another. Its application process is slow, burdensome, duplicative, and expensive, *by the U.S. Department of Labor's (DOL) own reckoning.*
- The H-2B visa, for temporary and seasonal non-agricultural workers, has a yearly cap of 66,000 H-2B visas given out each fiscal year. Since 2004, the yearly caps have been filled quickly. On January 3, 2008, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) announced that, "it has received a sufficient number of petitions to reach the congressionally mandated H-2B cap for the second half of Fiscal Year 2008 (FY2008)."

Congress should lift the caps on the programs. Most foreign workers coming to the

United States to work will only stay in the United States so long as there are jobs. When jobs dry up, foreign workers leave—so long as

they have the ability to return when the jobs are available again.

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