**Solutions to America's Growing Immigration Problem: The Route to Amnesty**

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Immigration has quickly become one of the central issues in the 2016 election cycle. Clearly, the immigration system is flawed. Over 11 million undocumented migrants currently lack a legal resident status and live in a perpetual state of fear with regards to deportation. Many on the right have called for an unconditional deportation of all undocumented immigrants. According to their logic, such migrants broke the law by coming to the U.S. illegally, requiring a proportional governmental response via deportation. However, despite what those on the right may say, denying amnesty to undocumented migrants would be a logistical and economic nightmare.

One of the reasons that granting amnesty to all undocumented immigrants is critical is because of the lack of a feasible alternative; it would lead to a massive increase in government expenditures, making it a fruitless operation by the metric that many conservatives value the most: how much it costs. In order to deport someone, the government has to first detain the individual, give him/her a hearing, and finally transport him/her back to his or her country of origin. This might seem like a simple process, yet the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency (ICE) currently only deports around 400,00 individuals each year.⁠1 Thus, in order to accommodate the estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants currently in the United States, huge investments would be required into not only ICE, but also into the infrastructure necessary to deport migrants. One such investment would be hiring new ICE agents. ICE currently employs around 4,000 agents who are mainly charged with collecting immigrants that are arrested by local authorities.⁠2 Under any policy of mass-deportation, however, the government would be responsible for conducting raids and finding individuals that are not citizens. While ICE does currently conduct raids on an ad-hoc basis, mass deportation would necessitate an increase in the frequency and size of raids, meaning that ICE would be forced to find new agents. According to a recent report, ICE would need somewhere around 90,000 agents to successfully deport 11 million undocumented immigrants, given its current efficiency.⁠3 While this number is certainly an estimate, and the true number of new agents that ICE would be forced to hire and train might be slightly more or less, there is no doubt that the amount of ICE agents would increase, creating a huge burden on tax payers. On top of this new cost, the government would be forced to either open new detention centers or massively expand existing ones.⁠4 Currently, the average wait for undocumented immigrants between the time of arrest and a deportation hearing is roughly 29 days, meaning that the government is forced to provide food and a place to sleep while immigrants are awaiting trial. Any increase in the amount of deportations would require the government to increase its investment in these overcrowded facilities, buying new beds and more food for the newly arrested undocumented immigrants. What is more, only about half of the undocumented immigrants in the United States are from Mexico, meaning that the government would be on the hook to pay for millions of airline tickets to get migrants from Asia, Central America, and elsewhere back to their native countries.⁠5 Ultimately, the American Action Forum estimates that all of these costs will amount of about $400 billion, clearly making it ineffective in the eyes of conservatives.⁠6 To conclude, absent amnesty, investments would need to be made at nearly every level of the immigration system which would ultimately cost tax payers hundreds of billions of dollars.

Irrespective of the costs of such an operation, however, logistical challenges would make deporting the 11 million undocumented immigrants functionally impossible. For starters, it is difficult for ICE to determine whether a person is an illegal immigrant or simply a naturalized/U.S. born citizen. After all, many of the 400,000 deportations each year are simply the result of dumb luck, as local police officers determine that individuals are undocumented after issuing tickets or making traffic stops.⁠7 Thus, it seems unlikely that all 11 million undocumented migrants would be located and deported since there is no method for the federal government to systematically determine who is and who is not a citizen. On top of that, however, ICE is notoriously inefficient. For instance, in one worksite raid, ICE invested nearly 1,000 agents over a 17-month span, yet deported less than 200 undocumented migrants.⁠8 These bureaucratic inefficiencies and red tape that ICE goes through to deport migrants involves months (and in many cases, years) of investigation, making deporting 11 million undocumented immigrants shockingly unrealistic and time consuming. To conclude, even if Congress were willing to redirect the funds necessary for such an operation, it seems unlikely that it would ever be a success.

However, were such an operation to be successful, another major advantage to granting amnesty to undocumented migrants would be the economic ramifications of deporting all of the undocumented migrants in the U.S. According to the American Action Forum, roughly 8 million undocumented immigrants are employed, representing roughly 6.4% of the entire labor force.⁠9 In other words, any policy of forced deportation would remove roughly 6 out of every 100 workers from the work force. The economic costs would be extreme: business would downsize and enter bankruptcy as demand for labor reached an unsustainable level. As the report notes, the GDP would decrease by about 5.7%.⁠10 While this decrease in production might seem manageable and irrelevant, it would be nearly as large of a drop in the GDP as was seen at the height of the 2008 recession (which was about a 6.3% drop).⁠11 Furthermore, deporting all undocumented immigrants would result in a severe tax revenue drop. Specifically, the 8 million employed undocumented immigrants contribute roughly $12 billion in the form of income, property, and sales taxes.⁠12 Not only that, between 2004 and 2014, undocumented immigrants contributed over $100 billion to the Social Security Trust Fund, despite the fact that they will (most likely) never receive Social Security benefits, themselves.⁠13 In essence, the forced removal of all undocumented immigrants would represent a formidable blow to tax revenues, and would most likely lead the country into some sort of a recession.

To conclude, calling for the deportation of all undocumented migrants in the United States would be an utter disaster, leaving amnesty as the only practical alternative for addressing the immigration issue. Although some on the left might say that amnesty does not go for enough in addressing the classism and racism that many migrants face, it would improve lives of millions of individuals and set the stage for future reforms, such as granting citizenship to those currently in the U.S. illegally.

1 "The Costs of Mass Deportation." WSJ. Accessed June 1, 2016. http://www.wsj.com/articles/the-costs-of-mass-deportation-1458342018.

2 "The Budgetary and Economic Costs of Addressing Unauthorized Immigration: Alternative Strategies - AAF." AAF. Accessed June 1, 2016. http://www.americanactionforum.org/research/the-budgetary-and-economic-costs-of-addressing-unauthorized-immigration-alt/.

3 Ibid.

4 "The Costs of Mass Deportation." WSJ. Accessed June 1, 2016. http://www.wsj.com/articles/the-costs-of-mass-deportation-1458342018.

5 Ibid.

6 "The Budgetary and Economic Costs of Addressing Unauthorized Immigration: Alternative Strategies - AAF." AAF. Accessed June 1, 2016. http://www.americanactionforum.org/research/the-budgetary-and-economic-costs-of-addressing-unauthorized-immigration-alt/.

7 "The Costs of Mass Deportation." WSJ. Accessed June 1, 2016. http://www.wsj.com/articles/the-costs-of-mass-deportation-1458342018.

8 "Trump and Cruz Want to Deport 11 Million Immigrants. That's Literally Impossible. - FPIF." Foreign Policy In Focus. 2016. Accessed June 1, 2016. http://fpif.org/trump-cruz-want-deport-11-million-immigrants-thats-literally-impossible/.

9 "The Costs of Mass Deportation." WSJ. Accessed June 1, 2016. http://www.wsj.com/articles/the-costs-of-mass-deportation-1458342018.

10 "The Budgetary and Economic Costs of Addressing Unauthorized Immigration: Alternative Strategies - AAF." AAF. Accessed June 1, 2016. http://www.americanactionforum.org/research/the-budgetary-and-economic-costs-of-addressing-unauthorized-immigration-alt/.

11 "The Costs of Mass Deportation." WSJ. Accessed June 1, 2016. http://www.wsj.com/articles/the-costs-of-mass-deportation-1458342018.

12 US News. Accessed June 1, 2016. http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2016-03-01/study-undocumented-immigrants-pay-billions-in-taxes.

13 "Unauthorized Immigrants Paid $100 Billion Into Social Security Over Last Decade | VICE News." VICE News RSS. Accessed June 1, 2016. https://news.vice.com/article/unauthorized-immigrants-paid-100-billion-into-social-security-over-last-decade.