

**Study: Illegal immigrants a burden;**  
**Report contrasts federal taxes paid to services used**

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## **Body**

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A **study** released Wednesday by a conservative think tank in Washington says **illegal immigrants** cost the **federal** government almost \$10.4 billion more than they **paid** in **taxes** in 2002.

Titled "The High Cost of Cheap Labor," the **report** by the Center for Immigration **Studies used** census data to evaluate **illegal immigrants' use** of **federal** programs vs. the **taxes** they **paid**.

It found that **illegal immigrant** households each **use** an average of \$2,700 a year more in **federal services** than they **pay** in **taxes**, amounting to an overall \$26.3 billion in **services** against \$16 billion in **taxes**.

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Among the most-**used** programs were Medicaid (\$2.5 billion); food assistance programs (\$1.9 billion); treatment for the uninsured (\$2.2 billion); the **federal** prison and court systems (\$1.6 billion); and **federal** aid to schools (\$1.4 billion).

The **study** says legalizing the **immigrants** will only increase their costs. It says they will get more **federal** assistance but will not **pay** significantly more **taxes** because they are not likely to get better-**paying** jobs.

Pro-immigration groups criticized the **study**, saying it failed to take into account gains in American productivity that resulted from **immigrants'** willingness to take on low-income **service** jobs, such as the added hours middle-class parents can spend at work because they can hire nannies who are often **illegal immigrants**.

Frank Sharry, director of the Immigration Forum, a pro-immigration think tank, said the **study's** timing is political.

"They're trying to give fodder to their friends in Arizona who are pushing Proposition 200," a law that would deny education and other **services** to **illegal immigrants** and will be voted on in November, Sharry said. "They're trying to say, '**Illegal immigrants** are here and they cost you millions.' "

Jeff Passel, principal researcher for the Urban Institute, said that though some of the CIS **study's** methodology provides an accurate picture of the **illegal immigrant** population, it goes too far in estimating their cost.

Passel also said that the \$26 billion the government spends on **immigrant** households would not be money saved if they were to suddenly disappear, because much of it is infrastructure maintenance.

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Steve Camarota, the study's author, said he tried to be conservative when assigning costs.

For example, when it came to federal money spent on education, he divided it by household, despite the fact that immigrant households tend to have more children and thus account for more education spending.

But Sharry said the study is a general and disguised attack on immigrants.

"From my point of view they are looking at the issue from the wrong end of the telescope," he said. "They've asked a question that they already know the answer to."

Dan Griswold, director of the Center for Trade Policy Studies at the conservative and pro-immigration Cato Institute, said the study breaks no new ground and makes what he considers unfair assumptions.

"He's counting the costs of the children of these workers without counting the contributions they make over their lifetimes," he said. "Every kid is a net fiscal drag for the government. To charge immigrants generally with the cost of educating and feeding their children and not take into account the taxes that those children eventually pay is not proper accounting."

Griswold said it's misleading to only look at the fiscal impact.

"We've pretty much made a social choice in this country that the tax and benefit system is going to be tilted to people of lower incomes," he said. "The ability to hire low-skilled immigrant workers allows whole sectors of the economy to be more productive."

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