

# THE MORNING CALL

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## Immigration reform in America's best interest

Immigration reform will be high on Congress' agenda. After failing in 2007, comprehensive immigration reform is again in the public eye and opponents seem to be inching toward compromise.

Why this sudden turn into the winds of controversy? One, Republican leaders recognize that shifting demographics helped President Obama win re-election and they do not want to be the party of "no" on immigration. Two, both parties understand that Congress is viewed as a pit of petty partisanship and both believe that immigration reform could yield a bipartisan bill that could improve the legislature's low standing and bring political gains.

And though these are good reasons for compromise on immigration, there are at least five other good reasons for supporting reform, including legalization of undocumented immigrants.

■ Today's system contributes to illegal immigration. Americans don't realize that it takes years for a green card holder to bring a spouse or child to the U.S. As a result, some separated families ignore the law by entering illegally or by overstaying. Similarly, it takes years for a U.S. employer to bring in workers "the right way." Instead, faced with the demands of ripening fruit, unkempt hotels or uncut grass, employers hire the undocumented.

■ Legalizing the undocumented will reduce the deficit. Everyone complains that the undocumented don't pay taxes. In fact, they contribute to revenues through sales, gas and "sin" taxes, lottery tickets and gambling, application and licensing fees and rents. And they commonly make Social



**Matthew I. Hirsch**

Security contributions, often under mismatched Social Security numbers. (This means that they put into that system, but don't take anything out — to the tune of \$7 billion per year). Even so, legalizing the undocumented would mean billions in fines and in income and employment taxes.

■ Immigrants, whether legal or not, revitalize cities. Neighborhoods that had seen better days are seeing new life from waves of 21st century immigrants. Most new immigrants are thrifty and hardworking, and move quickly from renting to homeownership. Soon, neighborhoods see new shops, groceries and restaurants, catering to the tastes of their community. While the sounds and spices of these changing neighborhoods might roil some, without these new groups many neighborhoods would be left lifeless and impoverished.

■ Immigration restriction has high costs for many families. There are an estimated 10 million undocumented immigrants in this country. Many have spouses and children who are citizens. Deporting them or driving them out hurts their families, pushing them toward dependency. With a wage earner in the household, these families have a chance at economic stability and mobility. Without one, the children are faced with the challenges of single-parent homes, lower incomes, more reliance on government support and higher risk of falling prey to drugs, gangs and teen pregnancy.

■ Economics favor legalizing the undocumented. With estimated costs of deportation exceeding \$200 billion, no one thinks it is possible to deport the undocumented. Self-deportation — increasing pressure through restrictions — is self-defeating. Just ask the people in cities that passed tough laws to drive out illegal immigrants. In short, most of the undocumented are here to stay. In contrast, while the undocumented do impose costs in such areas as law enforcement, medical care and education, on balance the economic impact would be

favorable, by some estimates adding \$15 trillion to the nation's economy over the next decade.

These are just some of the reasons to support immigration reform, which includes a path to citizenship. Other aspects are less controversial. Yes, we want to secure the border against threats and we want to promote respect for the law. But we also want to create an immigration system that helps America be stronger, more vital and more competitive.

*"Immigrants, whether legal or not, revitalize cities."*

At the top end, we want to attract and retain the best and brightest and not erect barriers that discourage them from staying in America. We need immigration laws that recognize the demands of our economy in such areas as hospitality, health care and agriculture. We need immigration laws that unite families and do not force eligible immigrants to wait a decade or longer to come legally to America.

For some Americans, immigration feels like a threat — to culture, to jobs, to ways of life. Ultimately, it will be up to our lawmakers in both parties to look beyond politics and to summon the courage to enact reform, which is in America's national interest.

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