

Reasons to support immigration reform in 2013

When America's 113th Congress convenes after the New Year, immigration reform will be high on its agenda. After failing in 2007, comprehensive immigration reform is again in the public eye and opponents seem to be inching toward compromise.

DELAWARE VOICE

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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 Congress is viewed as a pit of petty partisanship and both believe that immigration reform could yield a bipartisan bill, which 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 the undocumented.

1. 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, or unkempt hotels, or uncut grass, employers hire the undocumented. Reform is needed to align supply with demand in the family- and employment-based categories.

2. Legalizing the undocumented will reduce the deficit. Everyone complains that the undocumented don't pay taxes. In fact, the undocumented contribute to revenues through sales, gas and "sin" taxes, lottery tickets and gambling, application and licensing fees and through rents. And they commonly make FICA contributions, often under mismatched social security numbers. (This means that they put in to that system, but don't take 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.

3. 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 hard-working, 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.

4. Immigration restriction has high costs for "blended" families. There are an estimated 10 million undocumented in this country. Many have citizen spouses and children. Deporting them or driving them out hurts citizen families, and pushes them toward dependency. With a wage earner in the household, these families have a chance at economic stability and mobility. Without

a wage earner, the children are faced with the challenges of single-parent homes, with lower incomes, more reliance on government support and higher risk of falling prey to drugs, gangs, teen pregnancy.

5. Economics favor legalizing the undocumented. With estimated costs of deportation exceeding \$200 billion, no one thinks it is possible to deport the undocumented. As for self-deportation, i.e. increasing pressure through restriction, this is self-defeating. Just ask the people in cities that passed tough laws to drive out the illegals. 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 \$1.5 trillion to GDP 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. 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 also need immigration laws that recognize the demands of our economy in such areas as hospitality, health care and agriculture. We also need immigration laws that unite families and which 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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