



## *“They Take Our Jobs”* Debunking Immigration Myths

### **MYTH #1 “Immigrants take our jobs”**

#### **THE FACTS:**

- **The largest wave of immigration to the U.S. since the early 1900s coincided with our lowest national unemployment rate and fastest economic growth.** Immigrants create new jobs by forming new businesses, buying homes, spending their incomes on American goods and services, paying taxes and raising the productivity of U.S. businesses.<sup>1</sup> In fact, between 1990 and 2004<sup>2</sup>, roughly 9 out of 10 native-born workers with at least a high school diploma experienced wage gains because of increased immigration.
- **A legal flow of immigrants based on workforce demand strengthens the U.S. economy by keeping productivity high and countering negative impacts as the U.S. aging population swells.** Of the twenty occupations that will see the largest growth in the next seven years, twelve of them only require on-the-job-training—including jobs in SEIU’s core industries like home care, cleaning/janitorial services, child care, and hospitality services.<sup>3</sup> But as native-born workers seek higher education and move up the occupational ladder, the number of native-born workers seeking employment in these industries has shrunk.
- **The problem with today’s economy is not immigrants; the problem is our broken immigration laws that allow big business to exploit workers who lack legal status, driving down wages for all workers.** If every immigrant were required to get into the system, pay their dues, and become U.S. citizens, we could block big business’ upper hand, eliminate the two-tiered workforce, and build a united labor movement that raises wages and living standards for all workers.

### **MYTH #2 “Immigrants Don’t Pay Taxes”**

#### **THE FACTS:**

- **On average, undocumented immigrants contribute more in taxes than they consume in public benefits,** and are estimated to have contributed nearly \$50 billion in federal taxes between 1996 and 2003.<sup>4</sup> They also contribute between \$7-8 billion in social security funds annually—that’s \$100 billion in the past 15 years that they will never claim.
- **By legalizing the undocumented workforce, we will bring these workers out of the underground economy and increase social security and federal tax revenue.** The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimated that if the 2007 immigration reform bill had passed, legalizing 12 million undocumented immigrants, it would have generated \$48 billion in new federal revenue through 2008-2017.<sup>5</sup> Likewise, legalizing immigrants will contribute significantly to the social security system since immigrants tend to be younger than the native-born.

### **MYTH #3 “Immigrants are freeloaders who drain federal and state coffers”**

<sup>1</sup> Richard Vedder, Lowell Gallaway, and Stephen Moore. *Immigration and Unemployment: New Evidence*. Alexis de Tocqueville Institution.

<sup>2</sup> Giovanni Peri, PhD. “Rethinking the Effects of Immigration on Wages,” October, 2006.

[http://www.econ.ucdavis.edu/faculty/gperi/reports/infocus\\_10306.pdf](http://www.econ.ucdavis.edu/faculty/gperi/reports/infocus_10306.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2008-2009 Edition,” <http://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/print.pl/oco/oco2003.htm>

<sup>4</sup> *Principles for an Immigration Policy to Strengthen and Expand the Middle Class*. Drum Major Institute. 2007.

<http://www.drummajorinstitute.org/library/35.html>

<sup>5</sup> Congressional Budget Office, “Cost Estimate of S.1348, Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2007,” June, 2007

[http://www.cbo.gov/ftpdocs/81xx/doc8179/SA1150\\_June4.pdf](http://www.cbo.gov/ftpdocs/81xx/doc8179/SA1150_June4.pdf)

## THE FACTS:

- **Study after study shows that undocumented immigrants contribute more to the economy than they take.** Despite the myths, undocumented immigrants are not eligible for most public services—like food stamps, Medicare and Medicaid.
- According to the Texas Comptroller, eliminating Texas' undocumented population in 2005 would have generated a 2.1 percent decline in the gross state product, a 2.3 percent decline in employment and a 2.6 percent decline in personal income.<sup>6</sup>
- **America's prosperity has long depended on the hard work, commitment and entrepreneurial spirit of immigrant workers.** Just as they have done for centuries, immigrants fuel the U.S. economy and create more opportunities for native-born workers. In fact immigrant buying power continues to surge: in 2008, Latino buying power totalled \$951 billion and Asian buying power totalled \$509.1 billion.

## MYTH #4 “Enforcement and Border Security will Solve the Problem”

### THE FACTS:

- **We all want to stop illegal immigration, but this costly strategy of deportation and enforcement without reform has failed over and over again and cost billions of taxpayers dollars.** At the same time that spending on immigration enforcement has skyrocketed, the number of undocumented immigrants in the United States has roughly tripled from 3.5 million in 1990 to 12 million in 2008. From 1986 to 2002, the budget for the Border Patrol increased tenfold from \$151 million to \$1.6 billion;<sup>7</sup> yet during that same time, since 1990, more than 9 million undocumented immigrants were added to our population.<sup>8</sup>
- **It is estimated to cost well over \$200 billion—more than four times the total Homeland Security budget 2008<sup>9</sup>—to deport today's 12 million undocumented immigrants.** This cost to taxpayers doesn't begin to account for the resulting devastation of communities, small businesses and local economies.<sup>10</sup>
- **Trying to eliminate the undocumented workforce through “enforcement-only” policies would only force more workers into the underground economy and decrease tax revenue.** The Congressional Budget Office estimated that mandating the employment verification program, E-Verify, would decrease federal revenues by \$17.3 billion from 2009-2018 by pushing millions of workers further into the underground economy.<sup>11</sup>

## MYTH #5 “Immigrants Don't Want to Learn English or Become Americans”

### THE FACTS:

- **Immigrants today prove what centuries of immigrants have done before them—they have come here to work hard, succeed, raise the American flag with pride and embrace the freedoms and opportunity that make America great.** Immigrants who arrived in the past 25 years have assimilated faster in terms of employment, education, homeownership, ability to speak English, naturalization rates, and military service than their counterparts of a century ago.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>6</sup> *Undocumented Immigrants in Texas: A Financial Analysis of the Impact to the State Budget and Economy.* Texas State Comptroller, December 2006.

<sup>7</sup> Massey, Douglas. *Backfire at the Border: Why Enforcement Without Legislation Cannot Stop Illegal Immigration.* Center for Trade Policy Studies. June, 2005. <http://www.freetrade.org/pubs/pas/tpa-029.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Passel, Jeffrey. *The Size and Characteristics of the Unauthorized Population in the U.S.* Pew Hispanic Center. March, 2006. <http://pewhispanic.org/files/reports/61.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Department of Homeland Security, “Budget for Fiscal year 2009.” [http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/budget\\_bib-fy2009.pdf](http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/budget_bib-fy2009.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Goyle, Rajeev and David Jaeger. *Deporting the Undocumented: a Cost Assessment.* Center for American Progress. July, 2005. [http://www.americanprogress.org/kf/deporting\\_the\\_undocumented.pdf](http://www.americanprogress.org/kf/deporting_the_undocumented.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Congressional Budget Office. “Estimate of the Budgetary Effect of H.R. 4088, the Secure America through Verification and Reform Act of 2007,” November, 2007. <http://www.cbo.gov/ftpdocs/91xx/doc9100/hr4088ltr.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Vigdor, Jacob. *Measuring Immigrant Assimilation in the United States.* The Manhattan Institute. May, 2008. [http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/cr\\_53.htm](http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/cr_53.htm)

- **Despite a drastic fee hike, in 2007, nearly 1.4 million immigrants applied to become U.S. citizens—almost double the number who applied in 2006.** A majority of Hispanics believe that immigrants *have* to speak English to be a part of American society.<sup>13</sup>
- High rates of military service among immigrants—35,000 immigrants or 2 percent of all U.S. troops have been deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan—reflect a deep commitment to the American way of life.

### **MYTH #6 “Immigrants are Uneducated, Low-Skilled and Building a Permanent Underclass”**

#### **THE FACTS:**

- In 2000, roughly 12.5 million legal immigrants in the United States had more than a high school education, and accounted for half of all immigrants living in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries.<sup>14</sup>
- **Immigrants have had a disproportionate role in innovation and technology and have fuelled growth of new businesses.** Half of Silicon Valley start-ups were founded by immigrants—including Yahoo, eBay and Google. According to the U.S. Census and analysis by the Immigration Policy Center, “In 2002, 1.6 million Hispanic-owned firms provided jobs to 1.5 million employees, had receipts of \$222 billion, and generated payroll of \$36.7 billion. The same year, 1.1 million Asian-owned firms provided jobs to 2.2 million employees, had receipts of \$326.4 billion, and generated payroll of \$56 billion.”<sup>15</sup>

### **MYTH #7 “There are more Immigrants Today than Ever Before in U.S. History”**

#### **THE FACTS:**

- **The percentage of immigrants among US residents was higher at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century than it is today.** Whereas, between 1870 and 1920, nearly 15 percent of the U.S. population was foreign born, today that figure is 12 percent.
- **As a proportion of the population, the number of immigrants in the U.S. is close to that of other advanced, industrialized countries.** In fact, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada have higher immigrant percentages than the U.S. and France and Germany have about the same.<sup>16</sup>

### **MYTH #8 “Many Immigrants are Criminals”**

#### **THE FACTS:**

- **Immigrants have the lowest crime rates of any other demographic group in the U.S.** In California, male Mexican nationals ages 18 to 40—those more likely to have entered the country illegally—are more than eight times less likely than their U.S.-born counterparts to be imprisoned.<sup>17</sup>
- **According to a 2008 report from the conservative Americas Majority Foundation<sup>18</sup>, crime rates are lowest in states with the highest immigration growth rates.** From 1999 to 2006, the total crime rate declined 13.6 percent in the 19 highest-immigration states, compared to a 7.1 percent decline in the other 32 states.

<sup>13</sup> *Hispanic Attitudes Towards Learning English*. Pew Hispanic Center. June, 2006. <http://pewhispanic.org/files/factsheets/20.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> David L. Bartlett, “U.S. Immigration Policy in Global Perspective: International Migration in OECD Countries” (special report, Immigration Policy Center, Winter 2007)

<sup>15</sup> Immigration Policy Center. “The Economics of Immigration Reform: What Legalization Would Mean for the U.S. Economy,” April, 2009.

<http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/images/File/factcheck/EconomicsofCIRFullDoc.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> Bartlett, *Ibid*.

<sup>17</sup> Crime, Corrections, and California: What Does Immigration Have to Do with It, a report released in late February, 2008 by the Public Policy Institute of California

<sup>18</sup> Nadler, Richard. “Immigration and the Wealth of States,” America’s Majority Foundation, January, 2008.

<http://www.amermaj.com/ImmigrationandWealth.pdf>