

# TALKING POINTS

## “PRINCIPLES FOR AN IMMIGRATION POLICY TO STRENGTHEN AND EXPAND THE AMERICAN MIDDLE CLASS”

- **The status quo on immigration policy is unacceptable for the middle class: current policy does not respond to the nation’s economic needs.**

Proposals to more stringently enforce existing immigration laws ignore our economic reliance on immigrants. Meanwhile, the status quo includes an exploitation of undocumented workers that threatens the current and aspiring middle class.

- **The middle class benefits from immigrants’ economic contributions as workers, entrepreneurs, taxpayers and consumers.**

Our economy is dynamic and the presence of immigrants contributes to its growth and the creation of new jobs that wouldn’t exist if they were not here. It is not a zero-sum game.

- **Immigrants, including undocumented immigrants, pay taxes.**

The average immigrant pays \$1,800 more in taxes than she receives in government benefits—a lifetime tax contribution of \$80,000 more than she and her immediate descendents receive in benefits. Undocumented immigrants alone are estimated to have contributed nearly \$50 billion in federal taxes between 1996 and 2003. Immigrant tax contributions finance vital middle-class goods like public schools and Social Security.

- **Immigrants are crucial to the long-term viability of our Social Security system.**

Immigrants are younger and tend to have more children than the native-born. In this way, immigration slows the decline in the ratio of workers to retirees, helping to keep our Social Security program robust.

- **Because immigrants are so important to our economy, enforcement-only legislation harms the middle class.**

Trying to enforce immigration laws that are fundamentally at odds with the nation’s economic reality is expensive and unworkable. Since the early 1990s, spending on border enforcement has tripled, yet the number of undocumented immigrants has also nearly tripled. We should fix immigration laws first and then work to enforce them.

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- **It is not the presence of undocumented immigrants themselves that harms the middle class, but the fact that they can be so easily exploited in the workplace.**

The vulnerability of undocumented immigrants in the workplace puts downward pressure on wages and working conditions for all workers, making it harder to achieve and hold onto a middle-class standard of living. Many employers take advantage of immigrants' precarious status to cut costs for wages, benefits, and workplace safety. They may then be less willing to hire U.S.-born workers if they demand better wages and working conditions. U.S.-born workers are left to either accept the same poor conditions as immigrants living under the threat of deportation or be shut out of whole industries.

- **All workers will benefit from a strengthening of workplace rights for immigrants workers.**

Once empowered to exercise rights at work, undocumented workers' efforts to improve their own working conditions would benefit all workers by making jobs more desirable. This means more jobs that can support a middle-class standard of living.

- **Legalizing the undocumented immigrants who are in the U.S. now would maximize their economic contributions and prevent the exploitation that threatens the middle class.**

It is important that the legalization process not be so burdensome that many immigrants find it impossible to regularize their status and a large population of undocumented workers persists.

- **A guest worker program for future immigrants is not in the interests of the middle class because it makes the two-tiered labor market official.**

The temporary nature of guest workers means they will always be more vulnerable than the mainstream of American workers. Allowing the workers our economy needs to be here permanently would make them more secure, preventing the exploitation that undermines the middle class.

- **Congress should formulate immigration policy that will bolster the critical contribution that immigrants make to our economy as workers, entrepreneurs, taxpayers and consumers and that will strengthen the rights of immigrants in the workplace.**