

## Would-be immigrants are an illusion

Adapted from *The Washington Post*, February 6, 2012

Though at loggerheads overall on the question of illegal immigration, both President Obama and some of his would-be Republican opponents, including former Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney agree on one point. They'd like to see undocumented immigrants "get to the back of the line" for citizenship. Unfortunately, this is not very helpful in that debate.

For sure, how the "line" would work is a moot point. The president apparently doesn't wish to force unauthorized immigrants to leave the US before applying for legal status. Mr Romney would like to see them somehow "self-deport", then line up back home for legal re-entry to America. This divergence of view does not matter since there is no line, not even a relevant visa category, for millions of immigrants.

Why? Because most of them – they are about 11 million illegal immigrants in the US – are unskilled or low-skilled Mexicans. Many of them have no relatives over age 18 who are either US citizens or permanent residents in possession of green cards.

That is why they are not legally entitled to a visa, whatever the category. They can obtain neither employment-based visas, which favor skilled or well-educated applicants, nor family-based visas, which require applicants to have spouses, parents or siblings who are US residents or hold green cards. Most unskilled Mexicans do not qualify for any immigrant visa category and there is therefore no realistic prospect for them to be legally admitted to the United States. About 50% of the unauthorized adults in the country are Mexicans who probably have no category for admission, according to Pew Hispanic Center senior demographer Jeffrey S. Passel.

Nonetheless, demand for labor is still strong and will continue to be so. At least 7 million illegal immigrants are in the American work force. They often do jobs that most Americans despise or won't do because they consider them as dirty or that they are too much qualified to accept them. (90% of the American school-age population complete their studies)

Mexicans could apply for "other worker" visas but this takes a long time – several years – and requires employers to back them. And no employer would spend the time and money it takes for unskilled workers.

It could be argued that America should favor employment-based visas more or create a new category of visas for skilled or unskilled "fortune seekers," who, like millions before them, have sought admittance to the US because hard work is rewarded there. Similarly, it would be a good thing to have the US have an improved guest worker program, one that offered American employers some reasonable prospect of hiring adequate numbers of immigrants in a timely way. But, unfortunately, so far, nothing as such exists.

During an election campaign, it may seem relevant to ask illegal immigrants to line up again. But it is a fiction that conceals the fact that politicians shy away from tackling that thorny issue.

## Document 2

### Illegal immigrants in the headlines

Adapted from *The Observer*, February 2008

The current crop of presidential candidates does not leave Ken Doty, a Californian rancher, indifferent. He is outspoken. He is outraged by the hot potato of American politics: illegal immigration.

Despite a war in Iraq and a looming recession, immigration is the bitterest fuel on the campaign trail. Republican supporters, who usually reckon immigration as one of the most pressing issues facing America, are particularly fierce. Such sound and fury infuriates Doty for one specific reason: who is going to harvest his lemons and avocados? He is among those who are afraid of labour shortages in US agriculture as the debate over immigrations is raging and the police are cracking down on illegal workers. Many growers could lose their crops, left rotting for lack of willing hands to harvest them. They say that the campaign debates focus on deportation and building a border wall and ignore the fact that large parts of the economy rely on illegal workers. "I just want a realistic debate," said Doty. That debate does not seem likely to happen soon.

Agriculture is a case in point. In California growers admit to employing between 80 and 90 percent illegal immigrants in their agricultural work force, who plant, tend and harvest crops. These people mostly come from Central and South America. They toil in backbreaking work for a minimum wage of around \$8 an hour. They sometimes earn even less and are abused - some campaigners consider this is virtual slave labour. Yet many top Republican candidates accuse illegal immigrants of taking jobs away from US workers. To many growers in California, that is missing the point. "It is all about demagoguery", said Doty, who believes few Americans would work such long hours for such low pay.

Farmers can make a profit and produce the cheap food which the US mostly benefits from thanks to those low wages. Indeed, if the 12 million illegal immigrants working in the US were deported, the economic effect would be a huge jump in food prices. While several top Republicans have advocated this deportation, leading Democrats urge for a work programme that allows workers to become US citizens to be implemented. Such schemes, such as the Bracero programme which brought Mexican workers during WWII to make up for labour shortages, have already been enforced. Those workers had fixed contracts and many were allowed to settle.

Henry Vega, a strawberry farmer whose father came as a Bracero, said he thought his labourers as a vital part of the economy. Their life stories could easily mirror his family's if they could legally apply for citizenship. He sees potential economic disaster if they cannot.

### A DREAM for immigrants

A plan to legalise those with higher education or a record of military service is a small step well worth taking

Adapted from *The Economist*, Nov 25th 2010

The to-do list of the White House has been ranging from saving the planet to global warming to closing down the prison camp at Guantanamo Bay to health care - which has turned from triumph to liability - and now last reforming immigration. As the House of Representatives is likely to pass into Republican control at the beginning of next year while the Democrats' majority in the Senate is to plummet, President Obama seems fairly unlikely to end his second year in office with an immigration reform secure. Even climate-change legislation has fared better than that.

This is bitterly disappointing. The United States is facing four separate immigration problems. One is to secure the southern border so as to cut the number of illegals who cross it, often risking their lives in the harsh desert. Another is to expand the number of high-skilled immigrants that the country lets in and keeps. Next there is the issue of making it possible to get an adequate supply of unskilled workers. Finally, and that is the trickiest issue, America has to figure out what to do with the 11 million or so mostly Hispanic illegal workers who have, for most, been doing jobs that Americans refuse to do for decades. Those people are constantly afraid of being deported.

In an ideal world, a "comprehensive" reform would solve all four problems in one go. Businesses would get hold of more software geniuses. Law-and-order pro-Republicans would have a tighter border. Democrats and Hispanics (who are quite staunch Democrat supporters) would be able to be fair to the 11 million right-less workers. Reality might offer more patchy solutions.

Concerning the border issue, there has been some success: more guards, smarter technology, more pressure on employer to make sure of the legal status of their work crews, plus (unfortunately) the recession have halved the number of border-crossers over the last few years. The more-Republican Congress might be willing to pass a rise in the number of highly-qualified visas if the bill is submitted next year. A guest-worker programme is harder but not that urgent in a recession. Yet no progress has been made on the plight of the 11m. The last attempt at reform in 2007 was killed in the bud with Republicans dubbing any form of regularisation as "amnesty".

Any courageous little effort would be a good thing on this issue. And there does exist a suitable, though small, proposal to that end: the DREAM Act. For ten years a bipartisan group of humane and sensible senators have been trying to have it passed. If it was, young illegals could earn their citizenship by either serving in the army, or by spending at least two years in higher education, provided in both cases they did not break the law. The fact that a measure that would alleviate the fears of the armed forces with recruits has failed to materialise shows how ugly the debate on immigration has become. Democrats can still manage to push the bill through the House of Representatives before the outgoing Congress breaks up at the end of the year, and the dare Republicans to stop it in the Senate. For favor, dare do it!

Document 4



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## ■ Tableau synthèse : US illegal immigrants

would-be immigrants ..., Feb 2012, <i>The Washington Post</i>	Illegal immigrants..., Feb 2008, <i>The Observer</i>	a DREAM for immigrants, Nov 2010, <i>The Economist</i>	Cartoon, Roy Delgado
2012 presidential election	2008 presidential election	2010 mid-term election	Immigrants : a necessity as unskilled workers
<p>Political agreement on idea of having illegal immigrants re-apply but no relevant visa exists &amp; disagreement on how</p> <p>Those concerned are mostly unskilled or low-skilled with no US relatives &amp; no employer sponsoring &amp; Mexicans</p> <p>Existing visas : skilled-employment-based, family-based or employer-sponsoring-based</p> <p>Wished-for visas, solutions :</p> <p>Preference given to family over employment basis</p> <p>New visa category for hardworking fortune-seekers</p> <p>Improving guest-worker prog</p> <p>Eco : demand for unskilled labour</p>	<p>Candidates &amp; esp. Rep. blame immigrants (12m) for job shortages for US workers</p> <p>Ex, a first-hand exp, Doty's, a farmer &amp; a descendant of former immigrants</p> <p>Means of control : harsh police crackdown, deportation, border wall</p> <p>Eco/consq : farm labour shortage as in California for ex. most farming work is done by immigrants who accept physically demanding &amp; low-paid work so that farming is profitable and food prices low. But if deportation, rise in food prices</p> <p>Solutions :</p> <p>Rep : deportation</p> <p>Dem : work prog that allow immigrants to become citizens. Ex of WWII Bracero prog. (Doty's family)</p>	<p>Obama's promise unfulfilled but urgent before election</p> <p>Pbs :</p> <p>Securing southern border</p> <p>Accepting more highly skilled</p> <p>Ensuring supply of unskilled (guest workers ?)</p> <p>Tackling issue of 11m illegal people</p> <p>Politics :</p> <p>Rep : law &amp; order -) tight border + deportation</p> <p>Dem : backed by Hispanics. Promise of reform</p> <p>Means :</p> <p>successful tighter border, more visas for the educated, possibility of guest workers but not urgent due to recession</p> <p>the 10-year-impending DREAM Act, i.e. earning citizenship via military service or higher education + law abiding. Long awaited and now a narrow window before new Congress</p>	

What could be done to tackle the issue of (permanent) illegal immigrants in the USA ?

- 1-political views – a hot potato
- 2-legal views
- 3-economic view esp. farming