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# Immigrants aid our economy

Recently I wrote about census undercounts being partially due to illegal immigrants who don't return forms because they can get free services anyway.

I didn't make it up. I had seen it in print. And I read and hear almost every day about the free government services immigrants scam off the American taxpayer.

I now can tell you there are people in our state who don't believe those claims. And they have figures to back up their arguments.

One set of those figures were released recently by the New Mexico Voices for Children. The report is entitled "Immigrants Contribute To, Not Drain New Mexico's Economy." It has been an eye-opener for me. You can read it at [www.nmvoices.org](http://www.nmvoices.org).

I learned that immigrants aren't eligible to receive federal monetary assistance, such as Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, unemployment, food stamps, child care subsidies, assistance to needy families or other welfare benefits. Even legal immigrants must wait five years to be eligible for these benefits.

But the feds do mandate that all immigrant children receive a public education and emergency medical care. Those are primarily state and local expenses.

It's difficult to argue that educating every person in our country is a bad idea. An educated work force is important regardless of whether it is native or immigrant. And statistics show that immigrants use emergency rooms at a lower rate than native-born residents.

So how much do we shell out for these immigrants' education? The answer, according to the study cited above, is nothing. Immigrants who receive a paycheck have Social Security payments deducted for benefits they never will receive. Most of them rent their living quarters and landlords include property tax payments in the rent.

Those two payments equal more than the cost of public schools, according to the study. In addition, those who receive paychecks also have income tax deducted. They can file to get their money back, but few do.

Although it is alleged that many criminals sneak across our borders and are a threat to national security, the numbers don't bear that out. Illegal immigrants know what will happen to them if they are apprehended. Because technically they are criminals already for being in our country illegally.

The study also found that a higher percentage of immigrants are employed than native-born residents. In short, immigrants work hard for low wages. They work in the private sector or are self-employed. Few have government jobs.

Although the focus is on immigrants across our southern border, many are from Europe, Asia and Africa. Forty percent of immigrants came through legal channels but overstayed their



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visas.

With America's current restrictive immigration policies, foreign students in our country on visas must return to their countries as soon as their studies are over even if they hold degrees in areas which would make them valuable to our country.

Microsoft's Bill Gates has testified to Congress that if our immigration policies were eased, he wouldn't have to outsource technical work to foreign countries.

The solution to our immigration problems must be comprehensive. Just as with energy policy, spot reforms to benefit narrow sectors won't pass Congress. Everyone will have to give a little.

America needs a larger work force than it has now. That need will become much greater as baby boomers retire. Only immigration will save Social Security. Those workers have to come from somewhere.

America's history is dotted with periods of anti-immigration sentiment. There have been reactions to Germans, Irish, Italians and Chinese among others. There were worries about those who didn't speak English destroying our national language. So far, it never has approached becoming even a minor problem.

And it won't this time. Also, don't waste much time worrying about Mexican immigrants secretly being here to take back the U.S. Southwest, which Mexico lost 160 years ago. They are here to work.

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