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Study Reveals the High Cost of Immigration to New York State

By Wayne Lutton

Legal and illegal immigration is costing New Yorkers a minimum of \$5.6 billion annually, a new study confirms. *Our Teeming Shore: A Legislative Report on the Impact of U.S. Immigration Policy on New York State* was prepared under the direction of State Senator Frank Padavan (R-Queens), the chairman of the State Senate Committee on Cities.

The Padavan Report is the first time an attempt has been made to assess the cost of immigration to New York's taxpayers. The result of a year's research, including hearings held in New York City, the Committee on Cities focused on the fiscal impact of immigration in five policy areas: social services, criminal justice, education, housing, and employment and the economy. To arrive at an estimate of the cost of immigration, Senator Padavan calculated the spending on behalf of immigrants by using the percentage of foreign-born residents compared with total state funding for education, welfare, and prisons. He then subtracted from the total the amount the state receives in federal reimbursements. Senator Padavan emphasized that his estimates are very conservative because they do not take into account the fact that post-1965 immigrants constitute a disproportionate share of the state's welfare and criminal populations.

"...post-1965 immigrants constitute a disproportionate share of [NY] state's welfare and criminal populations."

New York state is home to 20 percent or more of the U.S.'s total immigrant population. Nearly 500,000 illegal immigrants are believed to be in the state — with some 400,000 or more living in the New York metropolitan area. One-third of New York City's population is foreign born, a higher percentage than during the great waves of immigration at the turn of the century.

Attracted by generous social welfare programs, which aliens are often actively encouraged to apply for, the state has become a destination of preference for newcomers to America. During the 1980s, eight percent of the population of Guyana moved to New York City. Countries with over half of their total U.S.

illegal alien population residing in NY State include: Senegal (88.9%); St. Vincent (74.6%); Grenada (73.6%); Antigua (67.8%); Bangladesh (67%); Guyana (66.9%); Yemen (66.7%); Barbados (64.3%); Netherlands Antilles (60%); Malta (60%); Sri Lanka (57.4%); St. Lucia (55.9%); Red China (52.5%); Ecuador (50.8%); Trinidad & Tobago (50.4%); Dominican Republic (50.4%).

The major findings disclosed in the *Report* include the following:

Welfare: Estimated cost — \$2.09 billion. A state Department of Social Services survey revealed that one of every three public assistance applicants in NY state is foreign born.

Crime: Estimated cost — \$269.84 million. Twelve percent of the state's prison population is foreign-born. From 1985 to 1992, the number of foreign-born inmates climbed at more than twice the rate as U.S.-born citizens. And foreign-born inmates are more likely to be convicted of drug offenses and more serious offenses than inmates born in the United States. While foreign-born inmates come from 111 countries around the world, 29 percent of the total are from the Dominican Republic alone.

Education: Estimated cost — \$3.27 billion. Immigrants make up 13.5 percent of NY City's public school population and the city Board of Education needs to spend over \$1 billion to construct additional classrooms for immigrant students.

The Committee on Cities offered a list of twenty-one policy recommendations to deal with the problems associated with immigration, including measures to deport illegal aliens convicted of felonies; deportation of aliens who cannot justify their claim for political asylum; the repeal of laws prohibiting social welfare agencies from giving the names of aliens to the INS and other law enforcement agencies; endorsement of a moratorium on new immigration into the U.S. "until the scope of immigration's impact on our country is sufficiently understood," followed by a fixed, and sharply reduced, ceiling on total admissions.

In his introduction to the *Report*, Senator Padavan remarked,

American policy on immigration is in disarray...

It seems inevitable that whenever America's policy on immigration is analyzed, the words of

*Emma Lazarus ring in the ear — "Give me your
tired your poor; / Your huddled masses
yearning to breathe free...."*

*These words, inscribed on the Statue of Liberty
in New York Harbor, may today be an anthem
to billions, but forgotten is the fact that they
were chiseled into our national conscience
before the first shot was fired at the Battle of
Wounded Knee; before the Panama Canal was
dug and before Thomas A. Edison invented the
movies...*

*The world has changed. America has changed.
As New York State Education Commissioner
Thomas Sobol noted, "the society that they
encounter today is very different than that
which absorbed the immigrants of decades
past. The factories and farms that offered good
jobs to people with strong backs and a
willingness to work are largely a distant
memory."*

Senator Padavan is to be commended for initiating this investigation. Failure to collect hard evidence has hindered efforts to reform immigration policy. Other states need to establish commissions to gather information regarding immigration-related issues. ■