

Economist says American workers lose \$1,700 a year

WASHINGTON – Two decades of growth in the supply of immigrant workers cost native-born American men an average \$1,700 in annual wages by 2000, a top economist has concluded.

Hispanic and black Americans were hurt most by the influx of foreign-born workers, says a report by Harvard University's George Borjas, considered a leading authority on the impact of immigration.

The findings, to be released today, could influence wide-ranging immigration proposals being urged by lawmakers and White House officials.

Congressional Democrats plan today to launch comprehensive legislation whose provisions would legalize immigrant workers already here, guarantee labor rights and allow an increased flow of legal, temporary foreign workers.

Earlier this year, President Bush announced his own massive overhaul for immigration that would offer temporary legal status to workers now here and open the door for greater numbers of "willing workers" from abroad to take temporary jobs in America.

In his report, Borjas suggests that one effect

of such proposals would be to depress wage growth for Americans at all levels of education and job skills.

His study of two decades of wages concluded that U.S.-born high school dropouts suffered the most – a 7.4 percent drop in annual wages by the year 2000. For high school graduates and workers with some college, the loss was a little more than 2 percent. And for college graduates, wages were held back an average 3.6 percent.

Borjas found that U.S.-born Hispanic workers saw their wages reduced by an average 5 percent, and U.S.-born blacks experienced a 4.5 percent drop.

"The reduction in earnings occurs regardless of whether the immigrants are legal or illegal, permanent or temporary," said Borjas, an immigrant from Cuba. "It is the presence of additional workers that reduces wages, not their legal status."

The Borjas study on the impact is unusually bleak, said Jared Bernstein, senior economist with the Economic Policy Institute, a research group financed by labor unions.

"I think the magnitude of the effect is quite large relative to other research," Bernstein said,