

U.S. Immigration Policy is Stupid and Evil

by Peter Brimelow

In America we have a two-party system," a Republican congressional staffer is supposed to have told a visiting group of Russian legislators some years ago.

"There is the stupid party. And there is the evil party. I am proud to be a member of the stupid party."

He added: periodically, the two parties get together and do something that is both stupid and evil. This is called: biparti-sanship."

Our current mass immigration policy is a classic example of this fatal Washington bipartisanship. It is a stupid policy because there is absolutely no reason for it — in particular, Americans as a whole are no better off economically because of mass immigration.

It is an evil policy because it second-guesses the American people, who have shown through smaller families that they want to stabilize population size.

Unfortunately, our current immigration policy is consuming the environment with urban sprawl,

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hurting the poor and minorities with intensified wage competition, and ultimately threatening the American nation itself — what Abraham Lincoln called "the last best hope of earth" — with cultural and linguistic fragmentation.

And, of course, the current mass immigration policy is bipartisan. Both major party leaderships have tacitly agreed to keep the subject out of politics. No single figure is more responsible for this than Sen. Spencer Abraham (R-Mich), chairman of the Senate's Immigration Subcommittee.

Abraham was a key figure in sabotaging the most recent chance of reform, the Smith-Simpson immigration bill, in 1996.

Ironically, this was a truly bipartisan measure, proposed by Republicans but based on the work of the Jordan Commission, headed by the late black liberal Democratic Congresswoman, Barbara Jordan of Texas. She recommended almost halving immigration, in part because of its impact on the poor.

The economic stupidity of current mass immigration policy is illustrated by a brilliant new book, *Heaven's Door: Immigration Policy and the American Economy* (Princeton University Press).

The author, professor George Borjas of Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government, is widely regarded as

the leading American immigration economist. And he is an immigrant, arriving here penniless from Castro's Cuba in 1962, when he was 12 years old.

Borjas has every reason to favor immigration. He writes movingly about his own early experiences, and compassionately about the immigrant waves that have followed him.

But, as a scholar, he recognizes what he calls "accumulating evidence" that immigration has costs as well as benefits. "My thinking on this issue has changed substantially over the years, he admits.

Professor Borjas' devastating findings:

The current wave of mass immigration is not benefitting Americans overall. "All of the available estimates suggest the annual net gain is astoundingly small," writes Professor Borjas, "...less than 0.1 percent of the Gross Domestic Product." Roughly: less than \$10 billion in a \$7 trillion economy.

Note carefully what Professor Borjas is saying here. Sure, those immigrants who work do raise overall GDP. But the bulk of that increase goes to the immigrants themselves, in the form of wages. The benefit to native-born Americans, after everything is taken into account, is infinitesimally small.

Current mass immigration is not benefitting Americans overall — but it is transforming their country. For nothing.

Least-skilled Americans are being hurt. Borjas estimates that almost half of the increased wage gap between high school dropouts and high school graduates can be attributed to immigration.

Again, note carefully what Professor Borjas is saying. Mass immigration is not making Americans richer overall. But it is, in effect, redistributing income between Americans. Specifically, because immigrants tend to be unskilled, they compete with American unskilled workers and have forced their wages down.

Of course, profits for employers

of unskilled workers have gone up. But the employers' gain, according to Professor Borjas' calculations, does not cancel out the workers' loss.

And it's not just unskilled American workers. Any group of workers could be displaced. It's already happened in the computer software industry. Employers prefer to import cheap young immigrant programmers rather than retrain and pay older American programmers.

Current mass immigration is hurting key states badly. Because immigrants tend to be unskilled, and because we now have a costly social safety net, immigrants cost taxpayers money in the half-dozen

states where they concentrate.

A lot of money. For example, immigration has raised the taxes of native households in California by a stunning \$1,200 a year. Overall, this fiscal loss easily cancels out any small benefit immigration brings to native-born Americans.

Not only are Americans seeing their country transformed, they are actually paying for the privilege.

Oh, in case you're wondering: The amazing fact is that Borjas' views are the consensus in his profession — see the National Research Council's 1997 report, "The New Americans."

Evil? Or stupid? Either way, immigration policy is broke. And it needs fixing. Now.