The Daily Dish

The Administration's Stealth Immigration Reform

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Eakinomics: The Administration's Stealth Immigration Reform

With considerable fanfare the Biden Administration-to-be announced that on "day one" it would send to Congress a sweeping proposed reform of U.S. immigration laws. For those who believe that reform is long overdue, the prospect of developing a comprehensive, pro-growth reform was alluring and we looked forward to seeing the details.

And we still do, because despite the ongoing chatter about Biden's reform plan, it has disappeared. It's not on the White House website. Nor the House Judiciary Committee's. Nor their Senate counterpart. Senator Bob Menendez, who will lead the Senate effort, "outlined the Biden Administration's Immigration Plan, the U.S. Citizenship Act (USCA) of 2021," but no text exists. All that remains in the public domain is a copy of a campaign fact sheet preserved by Vox. Weird, just weird.

Using that as a guide, Whitney Appel, Isabel Soto, and I provided a simple outline of the proposal. The key pieces are:

- *Legalization of Unauthorized Immigrants*. The USCA creates an eight-year pathway to citizenship for nearly 11 million unauthorized immigrants in the United States, while Deferred Action Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients, Temporary Protected Status (TPS) recipients, and immigrant farmworkers would be able to apply for a green card immediately.
- *Border Enforcement*. The USCA will allocate additional funds to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to develop a plan for immigration enforcement at the southern border.
- *Legal Immigration*. The USCA would modestly reform the systems of employment- and family-based visas.
- *Focus on Root Causes of Migration*. The USCA includes code and funding for a $4 billion, four-year interagency plan intended to address what the Biden Administration sees as the main reasons of why migrants seek to leave their home countries and seek safety by illegally coming to the United States.

Those elements are fine areas for reform. As noted earlier, however, reform of the foundations of the U.S. immigration system is overdue. As we explain: "The growth rate of gross domestic product consists of two important pieces: (1) the growth rate of the labor force, and (2) the growth rate of output per worker, or productivity. Immigration can have powerful impacts on both. Immigration can raise the overall pace of population growth. At present, in the absence of immigration, the current low birth rates mean that the U.S. population will shrink. And because foreign-born individuals tend to have higher rates of labor-force participation, immigration translates into an even more rapid pace of growth in the labor force than simple demographics would suggest."

From this perspective, the key to a pro-growth reform is to fundamentally revamp the core visa granting criteria to better focus on skills and labor productivity. This would be a stronger reform, and certainly more attractive to

market-oriented conservatives. Hopefully, when the bill finally surfaces, adding this necessary element will be a core part of the debate.