



Insight

Immigration Reform in President Obama's FY 2015 Budget

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The president's FY 2015 budget touches immigration in a variety of ways, from emphasizing enforcement priorities to touting the economic benefits of comprehensive immigration reform.

The budget allocates \$10 million to support immigrants in the naturalization process and proposes establishing a public-private partnership, the United States Citizen Foundation, to support citizenship and integration. This is a relatively small amount of funding that could have a big impact, encouraging immigrants to become full participants in our country by helping them navigate the sometimes complicated naturalization process.

The budget also adds 2,000 Customs and Border Protection officers, increasing the number of officers to an historic level. Long wait times plague our ports of entry, particularly the land ports along the southern border. Increased staffing targeted to the busiest ports of entry could help facilitate the travel and commerce that are vital to these border communities.

The budget emphasizes the president's stated priorities on detention, proposing cost savings by expediting deportation of violent criminals and national security threats. The budget proposes shifting low-risk, non-mandatory immigration offenders out of detention to alternative programs, such as electronic monitoring and supervision. This is good policy, and a smart use of resources. Immigration enforcement should be focused on removing dangerous criminals. However, for members of Congress who do not trust the administration to enforce any immigration reform, the proposed treatment of low-risk offenders will not dissuade them.

The budget proposes more investments to support, enhance, and expand E-Verify, the system used by U.S. employers to check the legal status of their workforce. Employment verification is an important component to immigration reform by holding employers accountable for hiring a legal workforce. Any employment verification system needs to be efficient and effective so that both employers and workers can have confidence that it will be accurate. The proposed investment in E-Verify should be targeted as much to enhancing its effectiveness and accuracy as to expanding its reach.

The budget proposes cutting all funding for the State Criminal Alien Assistance Program (SCAAP), which reimburses state and local law enforcement for the costs associated with incarcerating undocumented immigrants convicted of crimes. SCAAP funding has steadily decreased over the years, leaving state and local law enforcement to absorb these costs. Immigration is a fundamentally federal issue. States and counties should be reimbursed for their assistance in enforcing our immigration laws.

The budget addresses the dire immigration case backlog by adding new immigration judge teams and establishing a pilot program to increase efficiency in the immigration court system. While falling far short of the immigration court system's staffing needs, this is an important step to making our immigration courts better. Our immigration courts have a years-long backlog, keeping immigrants in legal limbo for far too long. Immigration cases should be resolved quickly, and the additional judicial teams the budget adds are an

important first step.

By far the most important way the budget addresses immigration is by emphasizing the economic benefits of comprehensive immigration reform. Benchmark immigration reform that increases legal immigration and moves to a more skills-based system will [grow the economy and reduce the deficit](#). These are well-recognized benefits of immigration reform, and the administration is smart to acknowledge them.