

# BPC Report Says U.S. Needs Immigration To Counter Aging of Populace, Build Economy

By Laura D. Francis

Jan. 24 — If the U.S. economy is to keep growing, the country needs immigrants to fill workforce gaps created by an aging population, which means an immigration system overhaul is critical, according to a report released Jan. 23 by the Bipartisan Policy Center's Immigration Task Force.

“Macroeconomists generally accept that two fundamental components determine economic output: (1) the number of workers, measured by the size of the labor force, and (2) output per worker, which is based on the productive technology in the country,” according to the report, “Immigration: America’s Demographic Edge.”

Immigrants have an impact on the second factor because of their greater propensity than the native-born population to engage in innovation and entrepreneurship, but also help influence the demographic trends that affect the size of the labor force, the report said.

Most immigrants to the U.S. are younger than the native-born population: 95 percent of immigrants are younger than age 65 when they enter the country, the report said.

“A healthy level of population and labor force expansion contributes to both the supply and demand sides of economic growth,” it said. In terms of supply, a larger labor force means more workers to produce goods and services, while population growth also increases demand for products, the report said.

“In this way, immigration’s demographic effects—sustaining healthy population growth and reducing the rate at which society ages—promote economic vitality,” the report said.

## U.S. in Unique Immigration Position

According to the report, many countries with advanced economies are facing similar demographic challenges, but the U.S. is in a unique position to counteract those challenges because of its historical openness to immigration. Immigrants already are helping the U.S. demographic outlook by arriving in large numbers (about 1 million per year legally) and by having children at almost a 50 percent higher rate than the native-born population, the report said.

“We have a national creed,” that “it really doesn’t matter where you came from, it matters where you’re going,” former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice (R) said Jan. 23 at an event coinciding with the report’s release.

We have immigrants coming from the “poorest of countries” in order to earn a “decent wage,” as well as immigrants coming from “the most advanced countries” to be on the leading edge of technology and creativity, she said. “This is an advantage that the United States has had, and can ill-afford to lose,” the former secretary said.

Rice, one of the co-chairs of the BPC's Immigration Task Force, said an overhaul of the immigration system “needs to be truly bipartisan, even nonpartisan, on behalf of the American people, because it goes to the heart of who we are as Americans.”

One of the “most important principles” behind that overhaul is that the U.S. should remain “a place where the world's most ambitious people come to be a part of us,” she said.

#### National Security Implications

Former Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Henry Cisneros (D), also a task force co-chair, added that there are “truly significant national prosperity, national security dimensions of immigration.” “Demography is destiny. You could also say demography is national strength,” he said.

Cisneros said immigrants already contribute to U.S. population growth “so clearly” that if there were no immigration, the U.S. would stop growing by 2040.

In addition to decreasing the country's average age, Cisneros said, immigration has a positive impact on Social Security and Medicare, with immigrants contributing more to both systems than they take out.

Addressing those who fear increased immigration, Cisneros said, “You have nothing to worry about except to find ways to tap [immigrants'] full potential and put them to work for the good of the country.”

#### More Focused Law Enforcement

Task force member Michael Chertoff (R), former homeland security secretary and chairman and co-founder of the Chertoff Group, also said at the event that immigration is critical for maintaining national security.

“You cannot have a strong national security if you do not have a strong economy,” Chertoff said. That is why we need to “keep our economy growing, strong and vibrant,” he said.

Chertoff said it “takes a lot of courage” for an immigrant to leave his or her birthplace, travel to a new country with a different language and culture, and find a job in order to create a better life. That, he said, is the “spirit that made this country great from the very beginning.”

Chertoff said overhauling the immigration laws would save time and resources for law enforcement personnel, who “spend a lot of effort and money chasing people here without proper documentation.”

If there were legal ways for undocumented immigrants to come to the U.S. and work in jobs that native-born workers don't want to take—or for immigrants with “unique skills” to use them in a U.S. job—law enforcement could focus on crimes such as trafficking in humans, drugs and firearms, Chertoff said. That alone would greatly reduce the current pressure facing border security, he said.

In addition to Rice and Cisneros, the task force co-chairs are former Mississippi Gov. Haley Barbour (R) and former Pennsylvania Gov. Ed Rendell (D).