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Study: Legalizing undocumented adult Latinos would be boon to state's economy

By Teresa Watanabe

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California could reap an economic boon worth \$16 billion by legalizing its 1.8 million undocumented adult Latino immigrants, according to a USC study released today.

The economic benefits would come as newly legalized immigrants earned higher wages, spent more consumer dollars, paid more taxes and helped create jobs, according to the study by the USC Center for the Study of Immigrant Integration.

“People keep using our economic condition as an excuse to not do comprehensive immigration reform,” said Manuel Pastor, one of the study’s authors. “It’s just the opposite: What we need to do to right our economy and move forward is create a path to legalization.”

But Steven Camarota of the Washington-based Center for Immigration Studies said that legalization would also cost taxpayers. He said the majority of illegal immigrants already pay taxes, but legalization would make them eligible for scores of public services, including welfare, unemployment insurance and non-emergency healthcare.

“Whatever the drain is now, it just gets bigger with legalization,” he said.

The USC study did not examine the added costs in services to the state.

The study was released at a kickoff rally in Los Angeles to renew lobbying efforts for legalization, more worker and family visas and other elements of comprehensive immigration reform. Amid balloons, posters and lively cheers, several labor, religious and immigrant rights leaders spoke in favor of reform.

Angelica Salas of the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles said activists plan to hold town halls, identify and register pro-reform voters, and visit all 53 congressional representatives and two senators in the next few months.

The California effort is part of a 50-state campaign to amass enough congressional votes for reform legislation by May 1.