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Study: Illegal immigrants worth \$1.8 trillion to U.S.

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If the 8.1 million undocumented immigrants who cut lawns, bus tables and perform other jobs disappeared overnight, the nation's economy would lose nearly \$1.8 trillion in annual spending.

Texas, the second-hardest-hit state after California, would lose 1.2 million undocumented workers and \$220.7 billion in expenditures.

These are just some of the findings from a study done by the Perryman Group, a Waco-based economic analysis firm, whose work was commissioned by Americans for Immigration Reform, a group spearheaded by the Greater Houston Partnership.

Houston's business community is trying to revive the politically charged immigration reform debate that has stalled in Congress. It plans to raise \$12 million by December to fund a campaign for reform and thus far it says it has raised about 10 percent of that goal in pledges.

The government has recently increased enforcement, with raids at work sites and plans to build a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border. But getting rid of all undocumented immigrants would hurt, not help the economy, Charles Foster, an immigration attorney and chairman of Americans for Immigration Reform, said Monday. "If you do that, you would have serious economic upset," Foster said.

He said immigration reform needs to give employers a method of hiring immigrants legally.

"We need comprehensive reform that looks at our needs and addresses those needs," said Ray Perryman, president of the Perryman Group, which examined data for 500 sectors of the economy, Census Bureau surveys and other data to arrive at its conclusions.

Doing the work, or not

Perryman said that with many of the nation's baby boomers retiring and the nation experiencing a low unemployment rate, undocumented immigrants are performing the jobs other American workers could not.

Groups like the Washington, D.C.-based Federation for American Immigration Reform, however, disagree. They contend that Americans would do those jobs and that undocumented workers drive down wages.

'Subsidized jobs'

"In many cases, there were people doing the jobs before the illegal immigrants showed up," said Ira Mehlman, national media director for the federation. "In many cases, these are just subsidized jobs because the employer can get away with whatever he's paying. A lot of these studies begin with the presumption that the jobs would not be getting done if not for the illegal immigrants."

A 2007 report by the federation said the costs of education, health care and incarceration of undocumented immigrants in six states, including Texas, exceeds \$27 billion annually.

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