

## TALKING POINTS: **Guest Workers**

### **1 The U.S. already has numerous guest worker programs.**

Together, they bring in approximately 800,000 to 900,000 guest workers annually, regardless of the unemployment rate or the state of the U.S. economy.

- The H-2A program brings in an unlimited number of agricultural guest workers;
- The H-2B program brings in unskilled workers;
- The H-1C program brings in foreign nurses;
- The H-1B program brings in foreign workers in “specialty occupations,” including computer programmers, engineers, accountants, doctors, and K-12 teachers; and
- The J-1 program (a work-study program) brings in workers to fill many jobs traditionally filled by American high school and college students.

### **2 The U.S. does not need more guest workers.**

There is a vast *oversupply* of unskilled workers in the United States and there are many more job seekers than available jobs.

- There are approximately 22 million Americans who are unemployed or underemployed.
- Many of the unemployed are low skilled. In the fourth quarter of 2012, there were 8.8 million Americans with a high school diploma or less who were unemployed or who could only find part-time work.<sup>1</sup>
- Many high-skilled Americans are also out of work or underemployed. Two-thirds of the more than 9 million people with degrees in science, engineering, or mathematics are working in other fields.<sup>2</sup>
- During the current economic “recovery,” foreign workers are getting a disproportionate share of new jobs, extending unemployment for millions of American workers.
  - From June 2009 to June 2010, foreign-born workers *gained* 665,000 jobs while native-born workers *lost* 1.2 million jobs.
  - Between 2009 and 2012, 67% of new jobs went to foreign-born workers.<sup>3</sup>

### **3 There are no jobs Americans won’t do for a living wage.**

There is no such thing as an “immigrant job.” Immigrants and native-born Americans compete for the same jobs and American workers are increasingly at a disadvantage because employers have access to a steady supply of low-wage foreign workers.

- Americans make up the majority of virtually all (4 of 465) job categories tracked by the U.S. Census Bureau. The job category with the highest percentage of foreign-born workers was plastering and stucco masonry at only 56%.<sup>4</sup>
- In fact, 75% of food prep and service workers, 75% of janitors, 65% of construction and landscape workers, 58% of taxi drivers, and 50% of agricultural workers are native-born.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Steven A. Camarota, “Amnesty for Illegal Immigrants and the Employment Picture for Less-Educated Americans,” *Backgrounder*, Center for Immigration Studies, February 2013, p. 5 (<http://cis.org/sites/default/files/u6-fourth-quarter-2012.pdf>).

<sup>2</sup> Ross Eisenbrey, “America’s Genius Glut,” *The New York Times*, February 7, 2013 ([http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/08/opinion/americas-genius-glut.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/08/opinion/americas-genius-glut.html?_r=0)).

<sup>3</sup> Steven Camarota and Karen Zeigler, “Who Got Jobs During the Obama Presidency?: Native and Immigrant Employment Growth, 2009 to 2012,” *Memorandum*, Center for Immigration Studies, November 2012, p. 1 (<http://cis.org/sites/default/files/camarota-jobs-during-obama.pdf>).

<sup>4</sup> Steven A. Camarota and Karen Jensenius, “Jobs Americans Won’t Do?: A Detailed Look at Immigrant Employment by Occupation,” *Memorandum*, Center for Immigration Studies, August 2009, pp. 3-12 (<http://www.cis.org/illegalimmigration-employment>).

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*

#### 4 Guest workers disproportionately hurt minorities and young Americans.<sup>6</sup>

- As of February 2013, the unemployment rate for African-Americans is 80% higher than the national average;<sup>7</sup> and
- The unemployment rate for Hispanics is 25% higher than the national average.<sup>8</sup>
- The unemployment rate for teenagers is 25.1%; for African-American teenagers it is 43.1%; and for Hispanic teenagers it is 29.1%.<sup>9</sup>

#### 5 Guest workers benefit employers, not the U.S. economy.

In fact, the Congressional Research Service found that the economic gain from immigration is divided between the immigrant and the immigrant's employer.<sup>10</sup> Guest workers gain from employment in the U.S. and employers benefit by reducing their labor costs. Meanwhile American workers bear the cost of guest worker programs through displacement, lower wages, and taxes used to provide benefits to low-income guest workers.<sup>11</sup>

#### 6 Guest workers are a burden to U.S. taxpayers.

- Low-skilled guest workers do not earn enough to be net taxpayers, yet they qualify for benefits in many states. If guest workers obtain green cards, they will qualify for all federal programs, including Social Security and Medicare.
- Low-skilled, low-income guest workers also bring with them their spouses and children—who attend local schools and also are eligible for many state benefits.
- Guest workers who have U.S. citizen children generally may receive local, state, and federal benefits for those children.
- Guest workers generally qualify for tax breaks such as the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and the Additional Child Tax Credit (ACTC).
- Guest workers may get some health care through employers, but will be eligible for taxpayer subsidies through the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare) on “day 1.”

#### 7 Guest worker programs create a dependence on foreign labor.

This is especially true in agriculture, where employers' access to guest workers and illegal workers has hampered innovation and mechanization. This benefits larger commercial growers at the expense of small, family farms.

- Agricultural wages have *decreased* over the last thirty years, demonstrating that there is no shortage of available workers. Meanwhile, profits for commercial farms have skyrocketed.<sup>12</sup>
- Increasing wages for agricultural labor will attract more American workers.<sup>13</sup>

#### 8 Guest workers are never just “guests.”

- A significant number of the illegal alien population (approx. 30% to 40%) consists of aliens who have overstayed their visas. If we increase guest worker programs, we will only encourage more illegal immigration, especially without an effective entry-exit system to track the arrival and departure of all visitors.
- Employers have become dependent on an endless supply of guest workers as a source of cheap labor and more pliant employees. As a result, big business continuously lobbies for more guest workers regardless of the availability of U.S. workers.

<sup>6</sup> Andrew Sum, Paul Harrington, and Ishwar Khatiwada, “The Impact of New Immigrants on Young Native-Born Workers, 2000-2005,” *Backgrounder*, Center for Immigration Studies, September 2006 (<http://www.cis.org/articles/2006/back806.pdf>).

<sup>7</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics, <http://bls.gov/news.release/pdf/empst.pdf>, accessed March 20, 2013.

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*

<sup>9</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics, “The Employment Situation: February 2013,” <http://bls.gov/news.release/pdf/empst.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> Linda Levine, “Immigration: The Effects on Low-skilled and High-skilled Native-Born Workers,” Congressional Research Service, 95-408, January 29, 2009 ([http://assets.opencrs.com/rpts/95-408\\_20091105.pdf](http://assets.opencrs.com/rpts/95-408_20091105.pdf)), pp. 2-3.

<sup>11</sup> Dylan Matthews, “Wages aren’t stagnating, they’re plummeting,” *The Washington Post*, July 31, 2012 (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/wonkblog/wp/2012/07/31/wages-arent-stagnating-theyre-plummeting/>).

<sup>12</sup> Eric A. Ruark and Aniq Moinuddin, “Illegal Immigration and Agribusiness: The Effect on the Agriculture Industry of Converting to a Legal Workforce,” FAIR Horizon Press, April 2011 ([http://fair.thinkrootshq.com/docs/agribusiness\\_rev.pdf](http://fair.thinkrootshq.com/docs/agribusiness_rev.pdf)).

<sup>13</sup> *Id.* at p. 6.