



Center for Immigration Studies

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My organization estimates that 300,000 construction jobs could go to illegal immigrants as a result of the stimulus bill.¹ We stand by this number as a reasonable estimate. We feel that there are some problems with Factchecker's analysis.

It is a mistake to take the view, as Factchecker does, that, "no one knows how many workers who are here illegally might end up with a job funded by stimulus money." We think this misses the point of how an estimate can inform public policy. We would never argue that our estimate is precise, but instead, as our press release stated, this is an "estimate" of jobs that "could" go to illegal immigrants. In fact, the headline of our press release putting out the numbers is followed by a question mark to emphasize that the number is an estimate of what could happen.

Just as we cannot know the exact amount of oil in Alaska or the exact number of homeless people, we cannot know the exact number of illegal immigrants who will get stimulus jobs. But, as is the case in these and countless other examples we do not have to throw up our hands and say the question is simply unknowable. We can, in fact, make a reasonable and plausible estimate of illegal immigrants and stimulus jobs based on the available data. There are, of course, several challenges in creating such an estimate.

To be sure, it is difficult to determine how much construction and infrastructure spending there is in the spending bill. It's 1,073 pages with construction and infrastructure spending spread throughout. The Association of General Contractors of America (AGCA) states the total is \$134.6 billion.² We feel our estimate of \$104 billion is actually quite conservative. In fact, the AGCA states that there is also another 8.8 billion for school construction in the bill on top of the 134.6 they identify.

The fact that they list education spending separately highlights a key problem when reading the bill — schools may be built and repaired by construction workers, but should such work be counted as a construction job or education job? Even the Whitehouse job creation estimate, mentioned by Factchecker, groups jobs by "industry" not by

¹ <http://www.cis.org/SenateStimulus>

² http://www.agc.org/cs/rebuild_americas_future

"occupation." Thus if a school puts someone on the payroll to do construction work it may be listed as a job created in the education category not the construction category.

On the question of how many jobs are created for each \$1 billion dollars spent on construction and infrastructure we use research paid for by the high way administration, which placed it at 19,584 per billion. We use this estimate because a significant share of the jobs were for highway construction. Factchecker sites another figure of 15,000 jobs from the high way administration, but has questions about using that number as well. Calculating how many jobs are created by construction and infrastructure spending is difficult. But even this lower figure of job creation would still place the number of jobs at 1.56 million, assuming \$104 billion in expenditures. If we use the AGCA estimate of construction spending it would place the job figure at over 2 million. Stephen Fuller, a professor at George Mason University has his own estimates, that show that each \$1 billion in construction spending on an annual basis creates a little over 14,000 construction and construction supply jobs.³ Other estimates exist as well.

The key point is that we do have an idea of how many jobs will be created by the stimulus bill even if there is debate. We also have an idea of how much construction spending there is in the bill and we have an idea of what share of workers in construction are illegal immigrants. The fact that these things are all subject to debate does not mean we cannot make a plausible estimate.

One final point is worth mentioning. Although there is good evidence that the illegal immigrant population has declined recently,⁴ the available data indicates that their share of construction workers has remained about the same. The January 2007 Current Population Survey (CPS) showed that 28 percent of construction workers were foreign born. The January 2009 CPS, collected just two months ago, showed it was 26 percent. Given the margin of error in the survey, these two numbers are not statistically different. The CPS is one of the primary data sources used by researchers to measure illegal immigration. Our research and that of the Pew Hispanic Center shows that somewhat over half of the foreign born in construction are in the country illegally. If the illegal share of construction workers had declined dramatically, then the overall foreign born would have declined dramatically in the new 2009 data. Of course, the CPS does show a substantial loss in the overall number of construction jobs, but the losses seems to have hit US-born workers and foreign-born workers equally.

³ <http://transportation.house.gov/Media/File/Full%20Committee/20090122/Stephen%20Fuller.pdf>

⁴ http://www.cis.org/trends_and_enforcement

It's worth noting that the federal government publishes estimates of not only the size of the illegal population, but where they live and from what country they came, what year they arrived, etc.⁵ Others have looked at illegal-immigrant tax payments, employment and use of social services.⁶ Our analysis simply builds on this work.

If a blogger or reporter gives out our estimate as a hard and fast number, as if it were the number of student in the local high school, then that is a mistake. But if the numbers are treated as an estimate of jobs that could go to illegal immigrants, then it can help to inform the public discourse. This is the whole purpose of any policy-oriented research in areas where information is limited.

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⁵ http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/statistics/publications/ois_ill_pe_2008.pdf

⁶ <http://www.urban.org/publications/411338.html> and <http://www.cis.org/node/54>

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