



United States Senate Budget Committee

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Immigration And The Welfare State

New Data Reveals How The Obama Administration Defies Federal Law

It is an explicit and unambiguous tenet in federal law that those granted entry into the U.S. must be able to support themselves financially. But the Obama Administration has aggressively defied this strict federal statute. What are new promises worth when existing law is unilaterally waived?

Last year, the Ranking Members of Budget, Finance, Judiciary, and Agriculture Committees [wrote an oversight letter](#) to Secretaries Napolitano and Clinton that said in part:

“The [Immigration and Nationality Act] specifically states: ‘An alien who... is likely at any time to become a public charge is inadmissible.’ ... We were thus shocked to discover that both the State Department and DHS exclude reliance on almost all governmental welfare programs when evaluating whether an alien is likely to become a public charge... Under your interpretation, an able-bodied immigrant of working age could receive the bulk of his or her income in the form of federal welfare and still not be deemed a ‘public charge.’”

DHS even has a website, [WelcomeToUSA.gov](#), that features a page promoting welfare benefits to newly arrived immigrants. (Some of these benefits, under law, should **automatically disqualify the applicants** from entry into the U.S. The page is also being updated to promote free coverage under the President’s health law.) That DHS does not object to immigrant welfare use is confirmed by the Department’s data: from FY 2005 through August of FY 2012, **just 9,796 applicants out of more than 116 million were turned away on the public-charge basis** (amounting to a denial rate of 0.0084 percent). DHS even admitted that in the last year, *it was unable to find a single immigrant* who had become a public charge. In sum: Despite laws to the contrary, virtually no one is being turned away from the United States for relying on federal welfare.

Relatedly, USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack has stopped complying with efforts to learn more about his Department’s efforts to enroll immigrants and non-citizens on 15 USDA-administered welfare programs. The Department has even produced and broadcast soap opera-like “radio novelas” featuring individuals who were pressured into accepting benefits *despite insisting that government assistance was not needed*. USDA has also entered into a partnership with Mexico to boost welfare enrollment among non-citizens. Thanks in part to such controversial tactics, food stamp usage among immigrants has quadrupled since 2001. Vilsack missed deadlines in [October](#) and [December](#) to answer questions about USDA’s activities.

Against this backdrop, it should come as no surprise that a recent Center for Immigration Services [study](#) found that 36 percent of immigrant-headed households received at least one welfare benefit in 2010 (including [public housing](#)). The Heritage Foundation’s Robert Rector offered this [mathematical analysis](#) in 2007: “On average, low-skill immigrant families receive \$30,160 per year in government benefits and services while paying \$10,573 in taxes, creating a net fiscal deficit of \$19,587 that has to be paid by higher-income taxpayers... It takes the entire net tax payments (taxes paid minus benefits received) of one college-educated family to pay for the net benefits received by one low-skill immigrant family.”

As Ranking Member Sessions has explained, **“Encouraging self-sufficiency must be a bedrock for our immigration policy, with the goal of reducing poverty, strengthening the family, and promoting our economic values. But Administration officials and their policies are working actively against this goal.”**