



United States Senate Budget Committee

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S. 744 And The Welfare State

It is a long-held principle of immigration that those seeking admittance to a new country must be able to financially support themselves and their families. This is not only sound fiscal policy, but sound social policy that promotes the civic virtue of economic empowerment. In the United States, this principle was codified in Section 212 of the Immigration and Nationality Act, which states that “an alien who... is likely at any time to become a public charge is inadmissible.”

Oversight from the Senate Budget, Judiciary, Agriculture, and Finance Committee ranking members revealed that these restrictions are not enforced: In 2011, the State Department had a net public charge denial rate of just 0.003 percent; DHS data from 2005–2012 showed a similarly low 0.0084 percent. And DHS admitted it had not identified a single public charge case among anyone residing in the United States in 2012. Yet a recent report analyzing Census survey data found that “36 percent of immigrant-headed households used at least one major welfare program (primarily food assistance and Medicaid)” in 2010.

At issue is not whether aid is provided to individuals in need, but whether our welfare and immigration policies encourage economic freedom and self-sufficiency whenever possible.

Instead, the opposite is occurring: the government actively encourages immigrants to seek out welfare support. USDA has formally identified immigrants as one of its targeted recruitment groups, and the agency entered into a partnership to expand food stamp enrollment among non-citizens through Mexican consulates. DHS even has a website, WelcomeToUSA.gov, that features a page promoting welfare benefits to new arrivals. The San Antonio Express-News [described](#) the efforts of “*promotoras*” to increase food stamp enrollment among foreign nationals: “The push, fueled by state and federal grants, mirrors a nationwide initiative to enroll as many eligible Americans as possible in an effort to leverage their buying power.”

The Gang of Eight legislation does not even attempt to address this endemic flaw in our current system, and it presents no plan to ensure that those who enter the country in the future will not immediately fall into poverty and become dependent on government aid. No one benefits when an immigrant enters his new country with no prospects of gainful employment and becomes destitute.

As happens today, millions of future legal, low-skilled immigrants admitted under S. 744 will be pushed onto welfare programs for themselves and their households by government recruiters. (This is separate from the welfare access that S. 744 allows for current *illegal* immigrants through their households, through states and cities when they are adjusted to RPI status, or through the federal government once they become permanent residents and citizens in a period of years.)

In total, the federal government currently administers around 80 different means-tested welfare and poverty programs at a cost of \$1 trillion annually. From a fiscal standpoint, immigration reform should be guided by a candid acknowledgement of the enormous expanse of our welfare state and the aggressive practices currently being used to boost enrollment.

Sadly, the Gang of Eight legislation boosts low-skill immigration without corresponding reforms to these programs or practices—serving neither the best interests of the immigrant or the host nation.