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## The High Value of Immigrants to the country's Economic and Social Well-being

New York State Senator Malcolm Smith, one of the most influential elected officials in Albany, the capital of the EmpireState has a good reason to make that important call. It is: as the son of Caribbean immigrant parents, the President Pro-tem of the upper chamber, the first Black person to hold that job, knows how much people who were born outside of the United States have contributed to the prosperity of this "great nation."

So, when the Fiscal Policy Institute used Census data to reach some key conclusions about the role of immigrants in the country, Smith and others across the state, indeed the country, welcomed the news but were quick to add: we knew it all along.

In a nationwide study of the 25 largest metropolitan areas that account for half of the country's gross domestic product, the Institute concluded that immigration to the United States was "broad and diverse, bringing clear overall benefits to the economy."

As the Institute pointed out, the data analyzed in its extensive report that covered such cities as New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Dallas, Philadelphia, Houston, Miami, Washington D.C., Atlanta, Detroit, Boston, San Francisco, San Diego, Tampa, Pittsburgh, Portland, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Seattle, Minneapolis, Baltimore, Denver, Phoenix and others in between, "demonstrates that immigration and economic growth in the metropolitan areas are strongly and positively associated with one another."

Stated simply, immigration is good for the country. As a matter of fact, it has always been that way. Hence State Senator Smith's appeal.

Figures speak for themselves. A few examples:

- In the New York metropolitan area, which consists of parts of New York and northern New Jersey, Long Island, Brooklyn, the Bronx, Bergen County in New Jersey, Westchester, White Plains, Morris County in Pennsylvania and Queens and Staten Island, 28 per cent of 18.7 million residents, roughly 5.2 million, were foreign born. They account for 28 per cent of the economic activity.
- Los Angeles with a population of almost 13 million, immigrants account for 35 per cent or 4.4 million and 34 per cent of the economy.
- Chicago, 1.6 million of the City's people, 18 per cent were immigrants and their share of economic activity amounted to exactly 18 per cent.
- In Miami where 37 per cent of the people living or working there were foreign-born, their contribution to the area's economy was 38 per cent.
- San Francisco, a City where immigrants comprise 30 per cent of the 4.1 million, that's a share of 1.2 million, they contribute 29 per cent to the gross domestic product.

In almost every case, the figures of economic activity matched the size of immigrant population. In such places as Detroit, Cincinnati and Baltimore, the contribution was slightly higher. In a few cities, the numbers showed a smaller contribution than the size of the immigrant population, nothing to worry about.

What, then, can be said about this bit of invaluable research?

Several things come quickly to mind.

At the top of the list is that immigration is a spur to economic activity but certainly not a drag on it.

Next is the impact of immigrants on the labor market. "In many instances immigrants are complementary to U.S. born workers rather than being in direct competition with them," stated the Institute.

Then, there is the issue of how well are they doing? The foreign born are faring "reasonably well" in managerial and professional jobs. When it comes to earnings, there isn't a large disparity between the native-born and foreigners. That's important because of the often sweeping generalization that immigrants depress wages and conditions of service. That's the good news.

The bad news comes in the service jobs where all workers, both native and foreign "have a hard time making ends meet." The problem is more acute when efforts are being made to set standards for higher pay for everyone.

Immigrants get the shaft, if you will when blue collar jobs were studied. The foreign workers "have consistently low earnings." That's why the key challenge is to raise the pay for everybody.

These findings are vital because the Barack Obama Administration is preparing an extensive overhaul of the immigration system and the danger is that the White House may place too much emphasis on enforcement and deportation than on improving the lives of people already in the country.

Yes, there is a clear need for a pathway to citizenship. But it is counter-productive to deport people who have established secure lives in the land of their adoption.

The Fiscal Policy Institute's study has provided us with valuable ammunition for those in the battle against closing the borders and deporting 12 million undocumented immigrants.

## Climate Change, Decision in Copenhagen What the Caribbean Wants

As he stood before the United Nation's General Assembly in late September, Patrick Manning, Trinidad and Tobago's Prime Minister, summarized the situation well for the Caribbean, indeed, for countries everywhere.

"Climate change is today one of the major challenges facing our civilization," was the way he put it, quite succinctly in New York.

Not much, if anything at all has changed in the two months since Manning and a host of Caribbean leaders and senior cabinet ministers addressed the world body, and as heads of government from rich and poor countries alike meet in Copenhagen for 14 days to try to decide where the international community will go from here, Manning's challenge looms larger.

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That's because, there is a change of atmosphere, beginning in Washington after President Barack Obama moved into the White House and the strident anti-climate change rhetoric of the Bush Administration gave way to more conciliatory tones. What the 100 leaders and others who arrived in Denmark this week are seeking to do is to negotiate an agreement that would replace, perhaps renew in a better way of putting it, the Kyoto protocol, which the U.S. had previously decided not to honor.

Climate change is a hard fact of life and for small countries, such as the island-nations and coastal states in the Caribbean, the consequences are dangerous. Sea level rise, stronger hurricanes and damaging floods, all of which have visited upon Grenada, Jamaica, Haiti and their neighbors in the past decade have been linked to climate change. The unseasonably warm weather in many cold weather countries has reduced the attraction of tropical tourist destinations, thus affecting their economic strength as well.

For the Caribbean the issues on the table are fundamental. One of them is averting a catastrophe which could reverse most of the economic and social gains made in the last 40-plus years. Even more important is the desire to avoid the kinds of floods that took hundreds of lives in Haiti, Jamaica, Grenada, Cuba, the Bahamas, the Dominican Republic, St. Kitts-Nevis and elsewhere in the region in the 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century.

Caribbean nations, such as Trinidad and Tobago, a small energy-producing country with a small population, want an acceptable system, "absolute emissions" that would determine a country's contribution to global warming. It has quite rightly rejected the per capita basis for the determination of carbon emissions.

Then, there are the questions of mitigation and adaptation to global warming, issues that go to the heart of the list of concerns of Caribbean states.

Like Barbados, for instance, Jamaica has articulated the need for a global adaptation fund that would help small states deal with the fall-out from global warming and sea level rise. The international community has already agreed in principle to the fund but how much the rich countries would contribute remains the unanswered question. The developing world is hoping that the industrialized giants would contribute at least one per cent of their gross domestic product to the Fund to help with both the adaptation efforts. That's reasonable. After all, the small states contribute the least to global warming but suffer severe damage from it, a point Dr. Kenneth Baugh, Jamaica's Deputy Prime Minister, made at the annual Caribbean Multi-National business Conference in Jamaica last month.

The Adaptation Fund and the cost of reducing emissions of green house gases can be viewed as an insurance policy which the average homeowners takes out to finance repairs or replacements of property after it has been damaged.

The members of the Alliance of Small Island States, AOSIS, including most of the states in the Caribbean are pushing the participating countries at the conference to establish the Fund's secretariat in the Caribbean as an indication of the international communication's interest and good faith in the concerns of the world's smallest countries. The trouble is that Germany wants it and the Caribbean shouldn't be caught offguard if Berlin gets it. How come? Germany is rich and influential enough to get what it wants. It's that simple.

At the end of the day, though, The Caribbean is hoping that a binding legal agreement, like the Kyoto Protocol, which emerged from the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, would be approved by next week. Such an agreement wouldn't signal the end of the struggle. It would simply mean that the work towards real climate change would just have started.

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