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Opinion

## A fuller view of immigrants

A new Fiscal Policy Institute report on immigration comes a couple of weeks too late to help Gov. Eliot Spitzer, who was forced at that time to abandon his driver's-licenses-for-illegals scheme. Actually it's doubtful the report would have saved that politically toxic plan, but it does deserve to become part of the larger debate over immigration — which will continue.

Of course one should be aware of the report's source. The Fiscal Policy Institute is a liberal think tank that is affiliated with unions and religious organizations (its use of the term "undocumented," rather than "illegal," immigrants is a telltale). A conservative think tank might well emphasize other things, such as the problem of rewarding lawbreakers. And it might reach different conclusions — for instance, that immigrants, particularly illegal ones, are a drain on health, education and social services.

But the report does provide some startling numbers that show the major impact immigration has on New York's economy and population. It breaks the state into three parts — New York City, the downstate suburbs and upstate — and finds that immigrants are well-represented and -integrated in all three. They are employed in many different professions, run their own businesses, own their own homes, pay taxes; increasingly, they are members of the middle class. Most of the report's emphasis is on legal immigrants, but even illegals, it suggests, pay taxes: sales, and in some cases property and even income tax.

The researchers point out that without immigrants, New York City, where 37 percent of the population is now foreign-born, would not have grown in recent years. And the decline in upstate's population would have been even worse. In fact, some counties, such as Schenectady, actually grew between 2000 and 2005 — and immigrants, including the Guyanese, seem to be the reason.

It's not just numbers, though, but what the immigrants are doing. While they represent only 5 percent of upstate's population, they make up an astounding 20 percent of university professors, 35 percent of physicians and surgeons and 20 percent of computer software engineers.

Upstate's struggling cities, in particular, can use more immigrants. As Mitchell Moss, professor of planning and public policy at New York University said in a recent Wall Street Journal article, "There's nothing wrong with upstate cities that a good influx of immigrants wouldn't solve."

The nation needs to recognize the value of immigration, deal with the illegal kind and do more to encourage the legal kind.