

OPINION

Unauthorized immigrants and their employers should pay for border security

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The government shutdown was an unnecessary showdown over a solvable problem. The solution would be easy for both President Trump and Congress to achieve.

Border security is about more than just a barrier. It's about intelligently shifting the economic burden of unauthorized immigration to the people causing the problem. Not to Mexico's 129 million people, and certainly not to all the legal, taxpaying citizens of the U.S., but rather to unauthorized immigrants and their employers.

Congress missed an easy opportunity to do this when it addressed tax reform in 2018. But it can still fix this oversight in 2019 by developing an effective tax for unauthorized workers — including 4 million in the cash economy — and those who hire them. An efficient tax would generate enough funds to mitigate many of the objections to the cost of immigration in this country, including border security.

Such action by Congress would also stem the loss of billions of dollars fraudulently collected by individuals who are not authorized to work in the United States. A study conducted by the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration in 2011 found that claims for a refundable tax credit based on earned income, called the Additional Child Tax Credit, had escalated sharply from \$924 million in 2005 to \$4.2 billion in 2010. TIGTA discovered that individuals who were not authorized to work in the United States received billions of dollars from the Internal Revenue Service in 2010. A separate GAO report says the problem hit \$6 billion by 2013.

There is a simple solution. My group, the Immigrant Tax Inquiry Group, has developed an efficient way to collect fair contributions from those who benefit most from illegal immigration practices. Employees and employers would each contribute five cents for every immigrant dollar earned, which would provide the president with \$5 billion for border security and \$210 billion over 10 years for immigration issues on the state level, including money for infrastructure. And there's an added bonus: This "Five + Five" plan would generate 1.7 million new American jobs.

The incentives for participating in the program are powerful: legality for employees and employers, access to healthcare and education, and the right to travel to their home of origin and return safely.

This plan will allow immigrants to assimilate more easily into our society with respect, equality, accountability and legality. And it can stand alone or be coupled with other plans, such as the Gang of Eight bill.

We don't need anymore shutdown showdowns. We need reform—now. The "Five + Five" proposal has been well-researched and is practical, fair and flexible—ready to evolve with other immigration law changes as they come. All we need is for Congress and the president to put it into effect.

Mark Jason is the founder and director of the Immigrant Tax Inquiry Group (ITIG). ITIG was formed to develop an immigration reform proposal that provides respect, equality, accountability and legality for workers, employers, taxpayers and the essential services we all rely upon.