



This is the fifth in a series of articles by the CCK Hispanic Committee on the **Catholic Campaign for Immigration Reform** which aims to reach beyond the networks of the participating national agencies, and to enlist the support of Catholic individuals and institutions in dioceses throughout the country.

Visit www.justiceforimmigrants.org for more information. Le invitamos a visitar nuestra página con regularidad, debido a que se estará actualizando constantemente con materiales, noticias relevantes y otra información que esperamos sea de su utilidad.

Common Immigration Myths: Beyond the Chips and Salsa

By Jose Neil Donis



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“Mexican” and that all Latinos are Mexicans.

If such simple things as differences between nationalities, foods and languages get people confused, it is easy to understand why there are a lot of misconceptions about immigrants on more serious issues such as employment, taxes, and the economy.

The Employment Myth Immigrants Take Jobs Away from Americans

Food is the first or one of the first opportunities people have to experience a different culture or to get to know something different from their own cultures.

In the United States and Kentucky, there are a lot of Mexican restaurants. Therefore it is in these restaurants where many locals have their first experience with the immigrant communities. Maybe that is why many have the misconception that all immigrants eat spicy salsa, speak

One of the myths that anti-immigrant groups promote is that immigrants come to the U.S. to take jobs from Americans. For me there is nothing more wrong than

this. From my own personal experience, I realized of the need for workers that existed in Shelbyville at the end of the 90s. During those years thousands of new immigrants moved from big cities to the southeast part of the country looking for more job opportunities.

Purnell's Sausage Company located in Simpsonville, Kentucky is an example of how immigrants came to fill the demand for workers. Thanks to these workers, Purnell's company was able keep growing and filling the demands of its buyers.

Also, there are several national studies concluding that immigrants do not increase the unemployment of the local population. One of these studies, (www.aila.org) done by economists Richard Vedder, Lowell Gallaway and Stephen Moore, found that cities with high concentrations of immigrants actually had low unemployment. These economists attribute this to the fact that immigrants increase the demand for goods and services, and this demand increases the need

to produce more goods and services, which creates the need for more employees.

The same study says that immigrants in general have a greater tendency to become entrepreneurs, which at some point creates more businesses and more jobs for local workers.

Thus, an increase in population, appears to increase the need for more employees.¹

Daniel E. Heckler, an economist at the Bureau of Labor Statistics, has reported that the number of jobs in the U.S. increased to 15 million between 1990 and 2003 and the U.S. Department of Labor estimates that between 2000 and 2010, more than 33 million new jobs will be created.²

The Tax Myth

Immigrants Don't Pay Taxes

Another myth that confuses people is that immigrants don't pay taxes. When an immigrant, documented or not, receives

his paycheck, taxes have already been deducted from it. Therefore, documented or not, all immigrants who receive a paycheck pay taxes. The difference is that undocumented immigrants can't claim benefits from the taxes they pay.

In a column titled “The Earnings Suspense File: Social Security's Secret Flash”, Martin H. Bosworth asks what happens with all the money the Social Security office collects from all people who never have access to it. Bosworth explains that a file known as “ESF,” or the Earnings Suspense File, exists within the Social Security Administration.

Due to the immigration debate, the money deposited in the ESF has become a subject of discussion because it has continued to grow at a rate of \$6 billion every year, totaling \$519 billion by the end of 2005. All this money is collected from people who have mismatched social security numbers. The ESF account was established by the Social Security Administration to collect money from people whose social security numbers don't match their names.

According to the Government Accountability Office (GAO), the ESF registered a total of 250 million reports of people in 2004, a number almost equal to the total population of the United States.

GAO's report says that a disproportionate number of the mismatched numbers and names come from restaurants and construction companies. It is common knowledge that many undocumented immigrants work in these two fields.

The report alludes to the fact that much of the earnings

reported from people with mismatched numbers comes from people using false social security numbers or numbers that have been stolen or sold to undocumented workers.

However, this issue receives little attention. Neither Republicans nor Democrats, conservatives nor liberals seem to want to discuss it, and Bosworth feels that it is not convenient for liberals to talk about the issue because they support immigrant rights. Conservatives don't talk about it either because they support corporations, which benefit from both documented and undocumented workers.

However the money deposited in the ESF continues to grow by billions. Immigrants are paying taxes.

The Economy Myth
Immigrants Are a Drain on the U.S Economy

As mentioned before, all immigrants documented or not, pay taxes, and therefore they help the economy. Preston Highway in Louisville is an example of this. Along 5 miles there are now at least 25 Hispanic-owned businesses and a growing number of companies that try to market to the Hispanic community.

Last year Governor Ernie Fletcher proclaimed September 27th as Hispanic Heritage Day in Kentucky. During the procla-



mation and in the written proclamation itself, it is established that in 2002 alone, Latinos in Kentucky generated the impressive number of \$783 million in sales revenue.⁴

Between 1990 and 2000 Kentucky experienced the eight fastest rates in Latin growth in the nation. Between 1997 and 2000, Hispanic business increased 40%, above the national average of 31%.

These numbers clearly demonstrate that, in Kentucky, immigrants contribute to the economy, so strongly so that the Governor noticed and proclaimed it for all to know.

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¹Richard Vedder, Lowell Gallaway, and Stephen Moore, *Immigration and Unemployment: New Evidence*, Alexis de Tocqueville Institution, Arlington, VA (Mar. 1994) at p. 13.

²Daniel E. Hecker, "Occupational Employment Projections to 2010," *Monthly Labor Review* (Nov. 2001).

³The Earnings Suspense File: Social Security's "Secret Stash," Martin H. Bosworth, (February 2006) at http://www.consumeraffairs.com/news04/2006/02/ss_secret_stash.html.

⁴*Al Dia en America* September 27th page 2, 2005.

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Action: Join Catholic Conference of KY's legislative advocacy network to influence immigration public policy, www.ccky.org.

Bishops call on the local church to help newcomers integrate in ways that are respectful, that celebrate their cultures, and that are responsive to their social needs, leading to a mutual enrichment of the local church.



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The Catholic Conference of Kentucky (CCK) is an agency of the Catholic Bishops of Kentucky, established in 1968. It speaks for the Church in matters of public policy, serves as liaison to government and the legislature, and coordinates communications and activities between the church and secular agencies. There are 406,000 Catholics in the Commonwealth. The Bishops of the four dioceses of KY constitute CCK's Board of Directors.