

# Immigrants contribute to LI's economy

**H**ow does immigration affect the economy? How do people answer this obviously influences which camp they fall into regarding immigration reform.

The immigration debate has been running hot on Long Island for some time, and is heating up once again in Congress.

One camp buys into the economic-pie school of immigration. In this view, there are only a certain number of jobs — or pieces of pie — to go around. Therefore, if an immigrant takes some pie, there's less for the native-born.

So this group would like to see a big chunk of the estimated 11 million to 12 million illegal immigrants in this nation deported. It also tends not to be keen on expanding legal immigration.

Fortunately, though, the

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economy is not about fighting for pie crumbs at the table. Instead, entrepreneurship, investment, trade, production and consumption mean the pie gets bigger, or more pies are baked.

That is, economic growth and job creation occur.

Understanding that this is how the economy actually works reveals immigration — legal and illegal — as an economic positive. Quite simply, more immigrants equal more workers, consumers, investors and entrepreneurs. And the data back this up.

For example, the 2007 edition of the "Economic Report of the President" noted: "Foreign-born workers (the sum of legal and illegal migrants) make up 15 percent of the total

U.S. labor force, and since 1996 they have accounted for about half of the total growth in the labor force, thereby fueling macroeconomic growth."

For good measure, recent studies from the National Venture Capital Association and Duke University highlighted major economic contributions from immigrant entrepreneurs.

But a study released last week from the Horace Hagedorn Foundation in Port Washington and Adelphi University drilled down to the impact of the Latino population, including legal and illegal immigrants, on Long Island's economy. Economists Mariano Torras from Adelphi and Curtis Skinner from Pelliparius Consulting noted, "Long Island's Hispanic population has grown dramatically in recent years, led by new immigration from Latin America."

They point out that the Island's Latino population has tri-

pled since 1980, versus 6 percent growth in Long Island's overall population. Factor out new Latino residents, and Long Island's population actually would be 3 percent smaller than its 1980 level.

So the importance of Latinos to the local economy has expanded. Torras and Skinner found that employment among Latinos on Long Island grew by one-third from 2000 to 2004. And between 1997 and 2002 the number of Latino-owned businesses on Long Island jumped by 35 percent, with growth in Suffolk County particularly strong at 51 percent. To sum up, the authors estimated that the Latino population in Nassau and Suffolk had a total economic impact of \$5.7 billion in 2004, including helping to create more than 52,000 jobs. The economic pie grew.

But what about the burdens immigrants place on local government services? Torras and

Skinner estimated that Latinos directly or indirectly generated \$925 million in revenue for local governments in 2004, while costing Long Island localities \$723 million. That comes out to a net positive contribution to local government of \$614 per Latino resident.

What does this all mean? Locally, it's time for some groups to stop kicking around immigrants, and instead start recognizing the role they play in keeping Long Island's economy afloat. Common-sense economics and basic human decency dictate welcoming immigrants and aiding their assimilation.

Meanwhile, our congressional representatives should be pushing for comprehensive immigration reform. Yes, tighten up the borders for national security purposes, but also expand legal avenues for immigration to keep our economy chugging along. It's clear that immigrants are not an economic burden, but instead a blessing.