

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

WEBINAR

THE BORDER WITHIN:
THE ECONOMICS OF IMMIGRATION IN AN AGE OF FEAR

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Introduction:

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Cabot Family Chair, Senior Fellow, and Director, Center on Children and Families
The Brookings Institution

Presentation: “The Border Within: The Economics of Immigration in an Age of Fear”

KALEE THOMPSON
Co-Author, The Border Within

TARA WATSON
David M. Rubenstein Fellow, Economic Studies, The Brookings Institution

Expert Panel:

KRISTIN F. BUTCHER
Cabot Family Chair, Senior Fellow, and Director, Center on Children and Families
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THERESA CARDINAL BROWN
Director, Immigration and Cross-Border Policy, Bipartisan Policy Center

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Associate Professor, César E. Chávez Department of Chicana and Chicago Studies
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ALEX NOWRASTEH
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Closing:

TARA WATSON
David M. Rubenstein Fellow, Economic Studies
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P R O C E E D I N G S

MS. BUTCHER: Hello, everyone, and welcome to what I'm sure will be a rich, interesting, and useful discussion of immigration. It's centered on a wonderful new book, "The Border Within: The Economics of Immigration in an Age of Fear", by Tara Watson and Kalee Thompson, published just last month by the University of Chicago Press.

I'm Kristen Butcher, the director of the Center on Children and Families at the Brookings Institution. I was eager to host this event around this particular book because, as you may already know, immigration is a contentious issue and the stakes are high for children and families. The book investigates the ways in which children and families are affected by policy changes. Further, the Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted how caregiving, both of the elderly and children, is a weak spot in our infrastructure, with critical implications for families and their ability to participate in the economy. And immigrant workers form a disproportionate share of the care-giving workforce. With the aging of the baby boom generation, these issues are likely to remain pressing, even when we hopefully one day very soon find ourselves out of pandemic mode.

While that issue is not the focus of the book, I think we should all have the coming care-giving needs in the back of our minds, or maybe the front, as we seek sensible immigration policies.

Suffice it to say it seemed like a good moment to take advantage of the publication of this book, which gets the economics right and weaves it together with the stories of families. And it seemed like a good moment to bring together an expert panel of people who have been thinking deeply about immigration for a long time, to help us come away with ideas about what needs to change and how that can happen.

Here's how the event will unfold until 2:15. First, Kalee Thompson, co-author of the book, and Tara Watson, the other co-author of the book, who is also a Rubenstein fellow in the Economic Studies program at Brookings, will tell us about their fascinating work. Then we'll turn it over to our expert panel, who are Theresa Cardinal Brown, the managing director of

Immigration and cross-Border Policy at the Bipartisan Policy Center, Raul Hinojosa-Ojeda, associate profession at UCLA, and Alex Nowrasteh, director of Economic and Social Policy at the Cato Institute.

After we hear their thoughts, we'll have about 25 minutes of question and answer with the audience before turning it back to Tara Watson for some concluding thoughts.

If you have questions for our authors or panelists you can submit a question by typing Sli.do into your browser and using the code theborderwithin to submit your question. You can also submit questions by using #Theborderwithin on Twitter or emailing us at Events@Brookings.edu.

With that, let me hand it over to Tara Watson and Kalee Thompson, the co-authors of "The Border Within: The Economics of Immigration in an Age of Fear".

MS. WATSON: Thanks for being here. We're delighted to tell you about our book.

In this book, "The Border Within", we investigate the impacts of both immigration and immigration enforcement, with a specific focus on interior immigration enforcement, that which happens within the borders of the country, in the U.S. And our approach is to combine what is known from the academic social science literature with stories of six immigrant families who have had interactions with the immigration enforcement system. And we think this paints a better picture of how the important immigration enforcement policies that we have play out on the ground.

We thought we'd start by sharing a few facts, just so everyone here has the same starting point for conversation. There are about 45 million foreign born residents in the U.S. That's about 14 percent of the population, which is similar to where the foreign born population was in the year 1900. About 11 million of those 45 million are undocumented —here without authorization. And the shape of immigration and undocumented immigration is changing over time. It's become more diverse and in the recent decade it has become even more diverse with increasing numbers of immigrants from Asia and Africa. It's also important to note that

undocumented immigrants are increasingly likely to be in the U.S. for a long period of time. So unlike in the past when most immigrants might have been in the U.S. for five or ten years, we now see that two-thirds of all unauthorized immigrants have actually been in the U.S. for more than ten years. That means their communities are in the U.S., their families are in the U.S., and our policies really need to take into account the effects of disrupting family and community relationships in a way that is more important than ever before.

One side effect of increased border control that's happened over the last two decades is that not only are immigrants more likely to stay in the U.S. for fear of going back and forth over the border, but also they are less likely to come in over the border and instead more likely to overstay a visa. It is now the most common way that immigrants coming to the U.S. without — or living in the U.S. without authorization come to the U.S. They arrive legally on a visa and then overstay that visa. So as we think forward to policies, we want to keep in mind that border control is only part of the picture here.

MS. THOMPSON: I'm Kalee. I'm Tara's co-author on this book. And just to talk a little bit more about the families that we profiled. Most of those that we focused on are in fact from Mexico or Central America. But we did focus on one family that is an example of what Tara was just speaking out with, you know, the increasing problems of undocumented immigrants who have originally come to the U.S. on visas which they then overstayed. And we focused on the story of two siblings originally from South Korea and they come to California as elementary aged kids, they were in third and fifth grade at the time, and their father had a student visa, had come as a student along with the rest of his family. When they started school they only knew a handful of words in English. You know, a couple of years went by and they did not return. They overstayed the visa and remained in the United States.

And a story that I heard from these siblings, which we heard actually many times in our reporting, is this sense that there was sort of a before and after with these kids when they realized that they were undocumented. So they'd actually lived most of their childhood unaware that they were in the country illegally. And in this particular case these siblings were at

college age before they actually realized that they did not have authorization to be in the country. Their family really shielded them from the reality of what they were facing and, you know, really the challenges that were going to be ahead of them. They were nevertheless both able to enroll in college. And at this point they're both young adults, they both graduated from four-year colleges, but they're still in a situation of being unable to work legally in the United States.

MS. WATSON: One of the things we saw in the book was the high level of complexity, as well as unpredictability and capriciousness that is present in our immigration enforcement system. So an obvious point here is that every time the White House changes hands there is the opportunity or possibility of huge swings in policy — and we of course saw that between Obama, Trump, and Biden. But equally important is what happens locally even within a given presidential administration. There are strong differences in how immigration enforcement actually happens on the ground. Even though immigration enforcement is a federal responsibility, it can depend on the attitudes of local enforcement, it can depend even on how a particular officer is feeling on a given day. And this just leads to a lot of fear and anxiety because people who are concerned about being caught up in the immigration enforcement system can't plan ahead and don't know what to expect from day to day.

MS. THOMPSON: So an extremely common example that we saw and focused on in our reporting, which I'm sure many here are aware of, is just the prevalence of routine traffic stops in — you know, in setting into action involvement in the enforcement system that very often can lead to detention and deportation. Three of the families that we focus on in the book, their interaction with the enforcement system really came to a head as a result of a pretty minor traffic infraction. One example was the case of an immigrant from Mexico named Marcos who was stopped for — the official charge was running a red light. He is quite certain that he did not in fact run a red light and believes that it was a case of racial profiling. But one of the things that he really pointed out to us was that many — he lived in California for many, many years, always been driving, never had this type of stop, and then this happened fairly soon after he moved to rural Ohio. And he in fact did end up ultimately being deported as a result of this

traffic stop.

Another very similar story was from another immigrant that we focused on the book named Eduardo Lopez, also a father. He was stopped on his way to work and it was a very standard situation where there was a construction road block. The factory where he worked for many years was just down the road and there was a sign that said "local traffic only", so he believed rationally that that applied to him. He was stopped by the police, arrested, brought in, and — a striking thing about it is as he was there in the police station, one of the officers who was booking him recognized him and said to him, hey, you look really familiar, you know, basically how do I know you. And then realized that they knew each other because they were frequent visitors of the same convenience store where they went every day at the same time to get coffee, they'd chat in the line. And when the police officer realized that it was him he actually apologized to him and said how sorry he was they had already called ICE and it was too late to stop that process from rolling into effect.

MS. WATSON: The fear and anxiety that I was talking about before has spillover effects that go beyond just the undocumented immigrants themselves. And the idea of fear and anxiety causing what we call "chilling effects" is another major theme of the book.

So it turns out, for example, that under the Trump Administration there were not more removals or deportations than in Obama's first term. It is instead the case that Trump used less prioritization, less discretion, and that created just a lot more anxiety and fear and the anti-immigrant rhetoric that went along with it also created a lot of anxiety and fear. And that in turn had a lot of spillover effects.

I have work looking at the effect of these types of chilling effects on safety net participation by undocumented families. I guess it's important to note that most federal safety net programs are not available to undocumented individuals, however, often the kids of undocumented parents are eligible because they're U.S. citizens. And what we see in the research is that when there is more enforcement locally going on, parents shy away from enrolling their kids in the programs for which they're eligible. So things like Medicaid public

health insurance, for example. Parents are less likely to enroll their kids in health insurance if there's a lot of enforcement activity in the area. That's an example of this type of chilling effect that we saw in many different contexts in the book.

It's important to note that even though safety net participation can go down because of this fear of enforcement, enforcement actions themselves can directly increase safety net participation in the cases where they remove the main breadwinner from the family.

MS. THOMPSON: And we saw an example of this with Eduardo, the same man that I was just speaking about who was arrested on his way to his factory job in the traffic stop. And he had a very high paying, good paying job that allowed him to single-handedly support his family, which included his wife, also undocumented, and his three young citizen children who had been born in the United States. At that point he had already been in the country for 14 years. His children, obviously, has spent their entire lives here. And as a result of that traffic stop, he spent four months in detention. He was eventually released from detention. But after he was released he ended up in a job that paid only half as much an hour as the job that he had previously had and his family did end up for the first time turning to the use of SNAP benefits, food stamps — for the first time. And it was interesting how he talked about that, because he was someone that was very proud of how he had moved up in the workforce, he was making a really great salary, he was saving to buy a house, really a family that was very organized with their finances and had plans for the future. And when he did — he did eventually get his old job back and the social worker had been helping them said to him, you can continue with the food stamps and he really did not want to do that. And as soon as he got that old job back he declined going forward with using the SNAP benefit that he was entitled to — or that his children were entitled to, which was totaling about \$200 a month that they were using for groceries.

MS. WATSON: So in this book, as I said, what we're trying to do is look at the social science and also speak to families about how the experience of immigration enforcement has impacted them. And we're really happy to have a group of excellent panelists here with us today to talk about policy and how it can move forward given the situation.

MS. BUTCHER: Great. Thank you so much for that introduction to your work. So thank you to Tara Watson and Kalee Thompson, authors of the book.

Now we'll turn over to our panel for their thoughts and reactions. Let me just reintroduce them.

First we're going to hear from Theresa Cardinal Brown, managing director of Immigration and Cross-Border Policy at the Bipartisan Policy Center, then Raul Hinojosa-Ojeda, associate professor at UCLA, and Alex Nowrasteh, director of Economic and Social Policy at the Cato Institute. Again, if you have questions for our authors or panelists you can submit a question by typing Sli.do into your browser and using the code theborderwithin to submit your question. You can also submit questions by using #Theborderwithin on Twitter, or emailing us at Events@Brookings.edu.

And with that, I'll turn it over to Theresa Cardinal Brown. Why don't you start off the panel?

MS. BROWN: Thank you so much, Kristin, and thank you to the Brookings Institution for inviting me. And thank you to Tara and Kalee for a very I think easily accessible book on a very complicated issue.

There's a lot of data and statistics out there and people who get a little bit of information about immigration from maybe a newscast or online only see tiny slices of what the complexity of the immigration is and how it impacts people. And so I congratulate you on a book that I think very adroitly mixes real information and data in a very balanced way I think with stories of individuals told from their point of view as to how these policies actually impact people on the ground. And I think those two lenses are really what needs to come together if we're going to really sort of try to see if we can change and improve immigration policy in the United States.

When it comes to interior enforcement specifically — and one thing you point out in the book is that there's a lot of attention paid to what happens at the border and not as much attention paid to what happens once people are inside the country. But it's a very

important thing to think about. You know, traditionally interior enforcement was sort of the, if you will, backstop for border enforcement. It was the idea that, okay, maybe we didn't apprehend somebody who tried to cross in an undocumented way across the border, but we would have a way to apprehend them inside the United States.

But I think as you point out accurately in the book, there are several challenges with interior enforcement. First of all is that we are a very large, very open country and it's not easy to look around in any location and go, oh, that person must be undocumented, because undocumented people can look like anybody. However, we do publicly tend to think about the undocumented as mostly Latino or Hispanic. And that affects the enforcement of our immigration laws because Latinos are — undocumented Latino persons are much more likely to encounter immigration enforcement than say African undocumented people or Asian undocumented people. It's not universal, but it's definitely true. So when you talk about how immigration enforcement is carried out in different parts of the country, that is definitely also true.

I think one of the challenges from a policy perspective of looking at how we conduct interior enforcement in the country is the concept that we have so many undocumented people in this country. We have somewhere between 10 and 12 million, depending on the year and depending on the estimate, that are undocumented. That is the largest number of undocumented that we know of since we've been trying to count that population. And there is a large amount of understanding for that population. And, as you've mentioned, many of them are — most of them have been here a decade or more, many of them are in what we call "mixed status families", with U.S. citizen spouses or children. They have created lives here. And that makes uprooting them challenging from a public policy perspective, from a humanitarian perspective, and from a law enforcement perspective. And that's one of the reasons why policy debates have focused a lot on legalization of the undocumented. But one of the problems I see with that approach or leading with legalization as the answer to interior enforcement is that every legalization we have ever had has been for a concrete discreet population of people already in the country based on when they arrived or how long they've been here or some other factor.

Almost never has included everyone in the country who's in an undocumented status.

But without fundamentally rethinking how we conduct the ways that immigration enforcement is conducted inside the country, we're not changing anything for the next person that overstays a visa or enters in an undocumented status. And I think that there's something that needs to be thought about in terms of our interior enforcement posture. Most of it is based on changes in law that were made in 1996 under the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act, or so called IIRIRA, which really cracked down on what were even then the minimally available means by which someone who is undocumented could try to get their status regularized through the law. It also made it very, very difficult for individuals to appeal to stay in the United States. And it really meant that the only penalty for any type of violation of immigration law was deportation.

That's not the case in any of our other criminal justice. There are proportional penalties based on the severity of the infraction. And I think one of the things we need to think about is bringing some of those concepts into our interior enforcement. If we can provide ways with cognizable penalties that individuals who have found themselves on the wrong side of immigration law can make an effort themselves to get back into status or acquire status. It might change the perspective, one, of our immigration enforcement, but also certainly the economics of it in terms of how much we have to spend on enforcement and how disruptive it might be in the interior.

So I think those are policy things that we need to think about going forward.

Thank you so much.

MS. BUTCHER: Thank you for those excellent points.

Next we'll turn to Raul Hinojosa-Ojeda.

MR. HINOJOSA-OJEDA: Thank you very much for inviting me to this very important conference and for a very important book.

I really wanted to commend Kalee and Tara for a very timely and incisive book, as was stated also, making a, I think, potentially really important contribution to the state of the

debate. And by the way, I am a professor in the department of Chicana and Chicano and Central American Studies at UCLA, having a background in economics, political science, anthropology. We are very inter-disciplinary. So I really like the inter-disciplinarity of the approach of these stories and combined with very top notch economic analysis. Very much important I think to drive forward the type of work we need in the future.

I think that the most important contribution that is both the findings and then the empirical research on debates that are reviewed in the book indicate that the notion of interior enforcement has not only this chilling effect, which is I think Tara's important work, on it, but also has a very severe set of unintended consequences. And that we are not only seeing that there's a cost to the current policy approach in these people's lives, but really in the economy as a whole. And I think that that's key. Comes out also in these case studies. We're seeing lives that are being muted, that the potential for their contribution to society is reduced. And that's really also what the economic policy literature is saying, that we are really reducing the potential for our society. And I think that has consequences also for how we have to argue for policy changes. More on that later.

So I think that this theoretical issue of the unintended consequences of enforcement are rooted in this very important debate that is traced in the book — well done, by the way — that puts on the one hand David Card and Giovanni Peri, for example, next to a proponent of the competition theory of immigration, that we need interior enforcement because we have a competition that we have to maintain internally in the United States. Well, I think the Nobel Prize speech and many of the literature is already pointing that this is not true, all right. The evidence is very much that rather than competition we're talking about complementarity, immigrants having great complementary position in the economy and extraction we could have a lot more complementarity and benefits for society. Research that at one point suggested that it was negative impact for certain African Americans, for example, low-income people, was explicitly discussed and refuted. Interestingly enough — and a little bit in the weeds here — George Borjas has his own book now, says, yes, this marginal debate for which we spent 25

years discussing on Latino and African American immigration actually misses the point that immigration increases the pie for everybody. And I think that that needs to be straightened.

So I thought it was really excellently done in terms of making the argument. Unfortunately, as I said to the authors, this comes back in the conclusion as a fundamental conclusion of African American competition is why we still need interior enforcement. I think it was unfortunate. I think importantly because I understand the need to try to balance. After all in Washington if we're going to get immigration reform at 60 votes, we're going to need to bring Republicans on board, but I don't think feeding this narrative is the best way to get to the right trade off. I do think we need engaged social science that looks at both politics and policy solutions going forward.

You know, on this issue of politics, you know, yes I understand that there are ways that need to be discussed — immigration in a way to bring in a bipartisan approach. We published a recent book called "*The Trump Paradox*", University of California, where we see a paradox in fact in this post — or in this anti-fact era. We have a situation where most negative attitudes on immigration are in fact co-related with congressional districts, counties where there is no immigration. And the fact where there is immigration, including African Americans and many others, it's a very pro-immigration position.

So I add the economic impacts of legalization, which we can get to later in the policy discussion, also show that this benefit is very strongly concentrated in places where there are immigrants already.

So, again, I think extremely important book. And I hope it helps us reset the way in which we need to create a balance of policy proposals going forward.

Thank you.

MS. BUTCHER: Thank you so much for that.

Next we'll hear from our last panelist, Alex Nowrasteh, and then we'll turn it over to the audience for some Q&A.

MR. NOWRASTEH: Well, thanks very much for the opportunity to talk about

this book today. I enjoyed it quite a bit. I must admit, when I first got the invitation to talk about this book I wasn't really looking forward to it because I've read 100 books about immigration, thousands of academic papers, and I thought, great, another one that's sort of like a general overview. But it's actually a stupendous book and there's a lot of reasons why. One, it's very up to date on the social science and it's very clearly explained what a lot of these papers are in the research, but also, two, the way in which the authors deftly weld together the narratives, these individual circumstances, that are complementary to the social science was actually superb. And it's one of the few instances I can recall of an excellent nonfiction book that sort of combines these two styles into one.

So it's a book that I have by — some of my colleagues have heard me complain about the very beginning before I started reading it, and then as I read it I said, well, actually this is a superb book. And I have a policy of not writing book reviews about books that I like because I think that makes for boring reviews. So I would say happily that I would not write a review of this book because I like it too much and it would be a boring review to read because of that. I mean like in any book, I have a quibble or two that we can discuss later if you want, but one of the things that really struck me in reading this book is how mostly ineffective interior enforcement is. It is effective at scaring people, it's effective at changing people's lives, the small number of people who are caught up in it and they're employers and their family, but broadly, given the size of the unauthorized immigrant population, how incredibly ineffective it is and how bad it would be if these programs were actually as effective as they're proponents would want them to be.

And one of the things that I liked in the book was a section that focused on e-verify. That was about this. And this is a program that I've spent a lot of time studying myself. E-verify is a federal system, it is an electronic eligibility for employment verification system. It's a web-based tool that employers can use to check the identity information given to them by applicants against — they run them through this on line — or connect to government databases to see if they're lawfully eligible to be employed. And this was a program that was created by statute in the 1990s and sort of refined in the 2000s. And it was a system that was sold as sort

of this silver bullet program. What it would do is ideally, according to the proponents of it, make it impossible, or at least very expensive, to hire unauthorized immigrants without permission. Because you run their ID through the system, the system is supposed to say well, so and so is an illegal immigrant worker, they can't work. And then they're not supposed to be able to get this job. And what's remarkable is just how often this system just fails and how easy it is to actually get around it.

So there was a good Reuters report that was out today about a lot of unaccompanied alien children, minors, who came to border, were apprehended and reunited with their U.S. family here. And they are — it is illegal for them to work. They do not have lawful work status in the United States and it's about — and the Reuters report is about how many of them are working currently. In Alabama — in chicken plants in Alabama, which is a state that has mandated E-verify for all new hires. If you are hired in the State of Alabama, you are supposedly run through the E-verify system. It doesn't matter whether you're an immigrant, a native born American, everybody is. But how everybody in the story, all these unaccompanied alien kids and other unauthorized immigrants were working. And they are working because they were able to spend \$1,500 to buy a fake ID with a real — that links to a real social security number, so you can be run through E-verify, they can check you out, and they can approve you to work. And I say \$1,500 — you know, \$1,500 is a lot of money for an unauthorized immigrant from Guatemala, but on top of the \$10,000 smuggling fee to come here and in exchange for being able to work lawfully at a wage that is five to ten times higher than what they make in their own countries, it's quite a deal actually. It's actually a fantastic deal from their perspective in terms of this.

And so what's remarkable to me is that we have this weird debate and dialogue in DC or in sort of the elite media about enforcement and how enforcement is going to work, and we need to have effective enforcement and this, that, and the other thing, while on the ground the enforcement mechanisms, especially the silver bullet program like E-verify is almost totally ineffective. And the interesting question is I think given the large number of politicians and

voters in this country who want harsh immigration enforcement, want to close the borders and deport anybody who is here who is even — a suspicion of being unauthorized is why do these really ineffective systems persist and why aren't more effective immigration enforcement systems every created. And I think it's because of the political incentives.

So you have a lot of politicians who have an incentive to get elected. They get elected by trying to appear tough on immigration enforcement, so they support things like E-verify, which sound very tough and sound very effective, but they don't actually work very well. But at the same token, at the same time, these politicians don't want to kill all the small businesses in their towns and ruin the economy. So they get the best of both worlds. They get to sound really tough by supporting a program like E-verify, but on the back end, it doesn't really work very well.

So not many people pay these really high prices or pay a high cost on immigration enforcement. Some unauthorized immigrants of course do. Some employers do occasionally. But it's really a small, small cost compared to the price that they would pay if these programs were effective.

So what you get is a situation where politicians can pretend to be tough, they can support the science fiction sounding schemes, like E-verify, that don't actually work, but in the end it doesn't actually hurt the economy very much. And politically everybody wins. And that's one of the reasons why we don't get worse enforcement programs. And I would say thank goodness for this system, because the only thing worse than this system would be if we actually had the political incentives aligned in a way so that if politicians wanted to actually create really bad enforcement mechanisms that actually identify and deported the 10-12 million unauthorized immigrants in this country.

So we like to talk about sort of the sclerotic political process that we have and how deals can't get done in Washington, DC. And sometimes I feel a frustration and I wish that they could get a lot of deals done so that we get a better immigration system and improve other portions of the law. But then on the other hand, I'm grateful for that sclerosis because it means

that we don't get a better immigration enforcement system in the meantime that would identify and deport all these people.

So I want to end on that high note and I look forward to going and listening all the question that people have to ask.

MS. BUTCHER: Terrific. Thank you, panelists. You covered a lot of ground. And we're getting nice questions coming in from the Q&A, but one of the things that's kind of a theme that's coming through is confusion about what is the economic impact of immigration. And I just — before we turn to questions of policy and what should the goals of policy be, I wanted to give each of the panelists a chance to just say something about what they view the consensus of social science is about the economic impact of immigration.

And I'll start with Theresa Cardinal Brown.

MS. BROWN: I would recommend they read the book because I think that Tara and Kalee do a very great job of covering all of the economic angles that people have questions about. Do immigrants take jobs from native born workers, do they lower wages for native born workers, are they a net fiscal contributor or taker from our coffers. And the answer to all of those questions is generally immigration is good for the United States. It is good for our economy, it helps our economy grow. Immigrants are not generally taking jobs away directly from Americans. They can foster and facilitate job growth and economic growth. In general they do not lower the average wages for most Americans.

Now those are generalities. And the thing about economics is there are generalities and then there are specifics. There may be specific cases where some immigrants are in competition with some Americans, there may be some instances where an American is not in a job because an immigrant is there. But those are very small and in general we think that an improved immigration system could address those without sacrificing the broad economic benefits that immigration has for the United States. And that's where the policy questions come in.

But many of the presumptions that people have just aren't true either if you're

modeling the economy or if you look at real world circumstances in the economy. And I think this book does a really good job at a level that people who haven't taken master's degree economics classes can understand.

MS. BUTCHER: Raul Hinojosa, do you have something to add to that?

MR. HINOJOSA-OJEDA: Yeah. Again, I mean I think it's really important to get into the weeds. And I comment my colleagues for writing this book in this way that draws people in from actual experiences and then goes through in the most recent — I'd say in the last ten years, really important set of I think almost conclusions to this debate, that — I would say that actually at the local level even makes the point even clearer that immigration is of net benefit. And the mechanisms why is the complementarity. It allows people in the labor force, many of them, to do other things rather than what immigrants would necessarily do. Not only agriculture, but services, and that in those areas where the immigration is present it allows people to move into more productive and higher paying jobs for the rest of the society.

So the distributional impacts of immigration, even as undocumented, are now I think becoming very clear, very strong. And, again — and I appreciate Theresa's point — in those places where there are immigrants, that's the strongest possible benefit.

I live in LA. I can tell you right now that the African Americans of extremely — of complementary in terms of what immigrants do and allow people to move out. Even other Latinos and recent immigrants, we're now seeing evidence of this.

Again, I think the importance of this economic analysis is for also showing the utility, the unintended consequences of the chilling effect on this positive process of economic benefit from immigration without having any stopping of policy — I compare it in many ways to our final aha moment on drug prices, that we spent years fighting this war on drugs and we created this massive incarceration system that when we actually said, wait, wait, what is the actual battle that we're trying to fight, it's a completely different framework. And we should stop using previous trade off systems which have only fed this ineffective and extremely bloated and expensive and I'd say undemocratic and racist and inhumane enforcement system that we need

to do away with and reset and start creating our policy perspective from this new vision of where not only the social sciences and economics, sociology, but also in politics, can take us to a sustainable and a much more beneficial set of policies going forward.

MS. BUTCHER: Alex?

MR. NOWRASTEH: Yeah, so the authors did a great job of sort of explaining the difference between substitutes and complements in the labor market, but one of the things that I thought was really new about what they talk about that isn't talked about very often is they talked about the demand side effects. So they talked about the impact that workers have on local markets, purchasing goods and services that are supplied by other workers, by other Americans. And that's something that I have found in my — at least in my appearances on the news, going on Tucker Carlson, debating him, is a lot easier to explain to people that immigrants are people who buy things and that creates jobs in that mechanism. It's a lot easier to get across to people than the difference between substitutes and complements in the labor market. All that stuff is important of course. Supply side of course is important. But I love the amount of attention that the authors gave to that demand side, which I think is often so frequently missed in this debate.

And it's frequently missed I think because we talk about immigration as an abstraction, but what we miss often is that we're talking about people. You know, we're talking about tens of millions of people in the United States and who come to the United States from abroad and they're doing it because primarily of the economic benefits that they reap from being able to come here. And one of the things that I wish the book — it's sort of implicitly discussed, but not like explicitly as much as I wish it did — was about the enormous benefits to the migrants themselves. We talk about — you know, you mentioned this in a few places in the book, especially in the narrative portions, but economist Michael Clemens, who you do cite in the book, you know, writes about how the median migrant to the United States who has about 10 years of education can expect a fourfold increase in his or her income. And that's taking account of the cost of living. And that is a dramatic improvement in one's productivity and one's

wages. Like I've never — I've been working since high school and I started working in LA where I grew up and I've never had one job to the next where it's a fourfold increase in income. Like that is — that is dramatic. Like I would move across the country, take my kids out of school — sorry, you gotta make new friends, kids — like take my kids out of school, I'd make new friends, go through all that headache for a fourfold increase in income, right. But these are folks who live in other countries, who face that wage pressure every day, and they can't take account of it, they can't take advantage of those differences because of the legal system that gets in the way. So a lot of them are tempted to break the law, and I totally understand why they want to break these international labor market regulations.

So it was a good section in the book, they mentioned it, but I wish there was just more of an emphasis just in the entire debate I guess about the fact that we really are talking about people when we talk about economics. And we're talking about the people who are in this book. And also in my mind, more importantly, the people who would be here if they had the opportunity to, but they're not. And those are the people who are the truly silent voices in this debate, is the people who are still overseas who would be here if we allowed them to, but who are stuck overseas.

But to put it bluntly, the economics of immigration are pretty one sided. They're pretty positive. They're positive for almost everybody involved, but most especially for the migrants who are the new Americans, who are the future Americans, and we shouldn't lose sight of that.

MS. BUTCHER: Thank you very much for that.

The questions are getting excited about well, okay, what should the goals of immigration policy be? What would it look like to have a balanced immigration policy? Whose interest should be taken into account? And what would that look like?

So Theresa, do you want to — Theresa Cardinal Brown, do you want to take a crack at that?

MS. BROWN: Sure. You know, it's interesting, because I've been working on

immigration policy for over 25 years and the components of what I think is a balanced immigration police haven't changed substantially in most of that time. There's pretty broad agreement on what used to be called comprehensive immigration reform, but really three substantive pieces.

Obviously we have to do something with the folks who are in the undocumented status right now. That's a legalization piece. That's sort of taking care of the past, right. The people that our broken immigration system has not served in the past. That's sort of a remediation piece, if you will.

The second piece is what do we do about our border. And I think the answer to that has change substantially since the last major attempts at comprehensive immigration reform in 2013, primarily because the type of people arriving to our border have changed and what they are looking for has changed. And you talk a little bit about this in the book, the idea that deterrence as an enforcement strategy has a primary effect on migration. And I think we are seeing right now the limits of deterrence as a migration prevention management strategy, because the desperation of migrants is so much different now than maybe in the past, at least in terms of who we're seeing now. So we need to rethink that border policy.

But the last and third pillar is one that we don't talk about enough and, frankly, has dropped out of the debate in the last five or six years, and that is reform of the legal immigration system. Our legal immigration system is basically still based on the foundations created in 1965, that has the primary basis in allowing people already in the United States to bring family members in and secondarily, in a much smaller number, economic actors to come in, whether that's employers sponsoring workers or people coming in who can be innovators and creators of jobs.

That's the framework we've had since 1965. The levels of immigration have not changed since 1990. They are set in statute and cannot be changed from administration to administration. So what Alex said earlier about the legal immigrants who can't come in — and you talk about this a little bit in the stories in your book — for many of these migrants who would

like to come to the United States, there is not a legal visa they could come in on, not in any reasonable way and many of them wouldn't qualify at all. The fact that they want to come and work and bring their economic vitality is not sufficient. And the pipelines for doing that are minuscule compared to the demand. And when you have high demand and restricted availability, that creates black markets. And that's essentially what undocumented migration in this country is, it's a black market in labor.

So one of the things that we need to think about is do we need to fundamentally expand and change our legal immigration system, and what would that do to change the incentives around undocumented migration and the need for enforcement. I worked at the Department of Homeland Security under the George W. Bush and the Obama Administrations first term, two different secretaries of Homeland Security, two different parties, both of whom said very explicitly and very publicly if you want me to secure the border, give me more visas. Because that would help manage the migration flow.

We are looking at census data now — just came out this week — that says that almost all of the minuscule growth in our population last year came from immigration. We've had the lowest population growth ever and what we have is entirely due to immigration. So thinking forward just as a country, if we want to continue to have the standard of living that we have in our country, to grow and create things and maintain the defense and national security posture that we have, if that's a goal of the United States, to be able to compete against rising competition, economically, from China or other parts of the world, we need to think about our population and how we can grow it. And I think all of these are really important things to think about if we're going to change the legal immigration system.

Coming back to interior enforcement, if we have those things in place, the need for interior enforcement would be severely diminished. And if we created pathways by which somebody who overstayed a visa for a month could pay a fine and maybe get in a line but be able to get back in status without having to send agents around the country to find them, that to me seems like a win.

MS. BUTCHER: Thank you.

Raul Hinojosa?

MR. HINOJOSA-OJEDA: I actually — this comment for Brookings in general, I think that this is exactly the type of area we need to push more on, with this emphasis on good social science and real stories. I think the — I would love to see these stories of these families, what happens after they get legalized and what — you know, I used to do that at — we had the URCA stories. People would tell the families. And you want to see a big increase, Alex? Look at what happens after legalization, all right. And within a generation the booming in housing, in small businesses, in their kids getting levels of education undreamed of, I think that's what — and we married that with the research that is coming out, which is now widespread from the Congressional Budget Office to a lot of the think tanks, we've done a lot of this, we're talking serious numbers — \$1.5 trillion over the next 10 years just with legalization as well as this very important point of new immigration.

And what does that mean in terms of actual families, communities. Because it's not just those families that change, the communities change and they change for the better. We need to think about that. And the more we do, we see that this change in immigration policy makes the enforcement part of it seem even more absurd, right. I mean the last thing we're talking about in terms of legalization of marijuana is building more prisons, and that's a good thing.

So I think part of — we need to marry this type of a focus. I specifically think there's two areas we need to look at in the next 10-20 years. One is North America and non-North America. There is a difference about North America. We are deeply integrated through families and communities that go back over 100 years and in Central America back now 40 years. I think that we should suggest a North American visa program, a program that basically says, look, we've been bringing in these X hundred thousand workers in these categories for the last 40 years as undocumented, why not allow these types of visas to be made for people to come in now. And that will have not only a dramatic effect in terms of wage increases in the

United States — we know this through past legalization strategies — but also this ability to get — and really get these multiplier effects that we now know about legalization. It's not just — and Alex is right — it's not just the direct and indirect. What we economists call the "induced effects". The increase of this well-being goes out throughout the society. And, in fact, we've also show that the society benefits when we let undocumented into, for example, programs like the Covid relief. Also to create that type of community and economic inclusion is good economic policy and good political implications as well.

We do need to recognize that we are going to need more Mexicans more than ever. In fact, we're going to run out of Mexicans pretty soon, all right. Like that movie we did, Day Without a Mexican — it's happening. We're going to need, as we're aging, even more. And Central Americans, guess what, it's not going to be enough to fill that gap. We need to think about Asia, we need to think about Africa as the ability to attract more immigrants and incorporate them as quickly as possible into the economy. And much of these resources that we spend on interior enforcement could be spent on interior incorporation.

And finally let me just say something about root causes. You know, the vice president — and that's great that we've brought that issue back up. What's really important is that the next 10 years we're also looking a trillion dollars in remittances. These families are here and even during Covid they're sacrificing to help these families back home. To the extent that we can do that through better banking systems to create sustainable and environmentally friendly as well as productive communities back home, that reduce and allow people to move back and forth across borders rather than keep them in — the wall keeps immigrants in a lot more than it keeps them out. That type of flow could sustain the ability for immigrants — a lot of them who are, by the way, getting ready to go back. And we're going to — we create a new sustainable North America, much like the European Union did. A couple of decades later we're now almost near the end of that process and that can happen, that can be North America in the next ten years.

MS. BUTCHER: Thanks.

Alex, do you have policy ideas to add to that?

MR. NOWRASTEH: I mean I agree with Theresa that the number one thing we should do is increase lawful immigration opportunities. And how — you know, going back to the question I guess, how do you do that sort of in a balanced way. And I just want to like emphasize that often times good policy isn't balanced. And I can understand wanting to start with the idea of what's balanced, but I think the first question we need to ask is what is the goal. And I think the goal is an immigration policy that creates the most amount of value for everybody involved. And then it's like how do you do that, how do you accomplish that. Well, I think you accomplish it by vastly liberalizing legal immigration to the United States. And that takes account of a lot of the problems that we have. We don't need a vast immigration enforcement system of it's a lot easier to come to the United State lawfully. That takes care of itself.

And so I guess the answer is pretty easy. You know, vastly increase legal immigration to the United States, most of these problems go away on their own through a well-regulated and legal market. I'm sure you going to have several thousand bureaucrats without a job after that and several thousand law enforcement agents without a job, but I think that's fine given the outcomes that we can have for the system.

And then we know what that policy is, then we can start talking about the compromises and politics and Washington, DC and trying to satisfy everybody's political prejudices. But let's at least start with what we know will actually work and then start messing around with that once we get into the maw of politics. But let's not start with a compromise and work from there, let's start with what works and then we'll build toward a compromise. And that's often times not balanced, what works. We just need to recognize that.

MS. BUTCHER: That's great.

I'll take my prerogative as the moderator to just point out that we also currently have a policy that has this chilling effect on what parents are willing to sign up for for their children and those children are U.S. citizens. And we have lots of excellent social science research showing that there are long-term effects on children of not receiving the things like

enough food and medical care. And so I didn't want that to get lost in the excellent discussion of the labor market impacts and all of the other policies.

So I'm not sure that everybody wants to talk to this, but there are lots of questions out there about should quotas be tied to market forces, how should that happen, do we want a point system, and how do we decide if we're not going to have open borders — you know, maybe we are — but if we're not going to have open borders, how do we decide who gets in.

Does anybody have any thoughts about what that should look like and how those decisions should get made? I know that's leading into the — we're going to have start talking about compromises immediately and what would be palatable, but, Theresa do you want to take a stab at that?

MS. BROWN: Sure. I mean I admire Alex for saying let's start with what works and then get to the compromises, but unfortunately that doesn't seem to be how our politics actually work.

You know, all of those questions are valid. There are a lot of different ways we could decide on what the right number of immigrants are. The one that I would guess that Alex would say is let the market decide. The government should not be in the position of deciding how many immigrants to let in, the market should decide because we have seen, and we definitely have seen that when there are fewer market incentives for people to come, as in fewer jobs, they don't come or they leave. Mexican migration is case in point. Mexican migration to the United States became net negative at the Great Recession and has not returned to pre-Great Recession levels in the United States as our economy recovered much more slowly than a lot of people would have wished. And now we have Covid. And Mexican migration I think was primarily labor dominated migration. You know, family relationships too, but a lot of it was labor induced. So that's one way. I'm not sure that's a politically available way. I'll put it that way. I don't think that that's something that our political leaders would actually allow.

So then there are other questions. Do you tie it to the unemployment rate in the

United States. If you believe that all immigrants are essentially competition for U.S. workers, then that simplistic answer makes sense. But I think, as Alex has said, and as the economics in the book make clear, it's not as simple as a one-to-one ratio between jobs and workers in the United States. And if there's an immigrant in a job then it must mean as American is out of a job. That is absolutely not true. So that's maybe an over simplistic way.

Colleagues of ours at the National Immigration Forum have done some looking at should we tie it to holding a population in the United States of working people such that the old age dependency ratio, the ratio of workers to retirees is held at a steady rate. We are in danger right now of getting to a point where our working population and our labor force is too small to support the number of retirees we have in our social security system. That's another way to think of it.

Other countries use independent commissions or boards of economists and labor people who then have input from worker groups and union groups and come up with some magic formula recommended that's supposed to be less political. Some people like that idea, others don't. I cannot see our congress completely giving up the power to decide how many come into the United States. But I would say that any of those would be preferable to the set it and forget it system we have now, which is the number of immigrants allowed into the United States was set in 1990 in a room between members of congress who sat around going, what's a good round number. Hmm, 400-some thousand, 500-some thousand. Sure, that sounds good to me. That's literally how our system was set, so I've got to think anything is going to be better than that.

MS. BUTCHER: Thanks.

Raul Hinojosa?

MR. HINOJOSA-OJEDA: Well, you know, again, I think that this issue is — we do need to take this regional perspective in terms of North America and in terms of beyond North America. You know, in a way we have not only a natural market experience, but an experience in North America of people who have already created and found most of the social networks

necessary to meet a lot of the demands. And increasingly throughout many new parts of the country, rural America, which is going to need this even more. And that's quite interesting.

I do think that a visa program that has built on the last 30 years of where immigrants have been coming from, Mexico and Central America, and basically make it available to governments for people to come in through the social networks I think is — could be extremely beneficial — with rights, make sure they are coming here with rights. I think we can do that. It's basically implicit in the legalization discussion so far, but I don't think people understand how those benefits all will actually accrue to this society. And I think we need to focus on that more.

We do need to think about new sources of immigrants from different parts of the world. And I completely agree the issue here is this demographic change and it's going to be a shock in the next few years when we start really understanding how we're going to deal with the aging of the society and the need for also a new type of workforce in a technologically changing era.

You know, so I think that what we need to think about here is an approach that will bring in, based on what we've — already works in North America, let it work better. And yes, we — I don't think the point system necessarily is that type of fine tuning. I think increasing the number of visas as it be proposed by the current legislation, that's scored in the CBE model, I think is enough to get us to managing both of these current undocumented as well as future needs that we're clearly going to have.

MR. NOWRASTEH: So I think we should have a market based immigration system, but that means letting markets decide, not creating a government systems that tries to mimic or predict or interpret what markets want, but just letting markets do it. It's a lot easier; it's a lot cheaper to let willing buyers meet willing sellers and agree on a price than is for a bunch of government agents to get in there and try to predict what that will be, right. The discussions in immigration that occur over this — not the discussions here, but the discussions sort of in broader DC about this sort of reminds me of a bunch of Soviet bureaucrats in 1920 trying to

figure out how to plan like the steel market. I mean it's just like a waste of time and it's not going to work very well.

But recognizing that we start with the what will work, let's go down to more practical. I thought was Raul said about how a lot of people don't understand the benefits of immigration, they're not obvious, gives us a way forward, right. We have a situation now where large numbers of unauthorized immigrants pay thousands of dollars in fees to smugglers to come up to the United States. They live in the black market, they pay thousands of dollars more to people, sometimes tens of thousands, to get fake ID. Why doesn't the government just charge them a price to come up? Cut out the black markets, cut out the middleman, and then you have an obvious benefit, right. You have migrant from, for example, Guatemala, \$10,000, he comes up, he gets a work permit for 20 years, let's say. That's less than that person would spend to come up unlawfully. He would be able to work legally, keep most of his income, and there is an obvious benefit that politicians, that we can all talk about, which is that money that that person pays up front. Now, I would want that price to be as low as possible. Ideally that price should be 0. but if that price has to be above 0, you can point to a certain dollar amount. You're regulating it with price, you get some labor market protectionism because you're limiting the quantity of people coming in through that price, but you get a mechanism that also ebbs and flows based on supply and demand in the U.S. economy. It's a lot easier to operate than a lot of these other systems that are proposed, it's a lot simpler, it's transparent, and there's an obvious benefit, which is the value of those dollars paid as a fee that cuts out the black market, that the U.S. government can then say see, look at this, these migrants paid X number of dollars per your billions of dollars in direct payments on top of all the taxes and everything else they pay. So it's not an ideal system, but it's a system that gets most of the benefits of markets with many, many fewer of the costs of attempted enforcement and allows more people to come here lawfully while killing black markets. Sounds like a triple win to me.

MS. BUTCHER: All right. That's great.

I'm mindful of the time and so just an ending task for our panelists, could you

just say very briefly one thing — if we could give you a magic wand — that you would change for the better.

Theresa?

MS. BROWN: Well, I mean we've gone through a whole part — a lot of different parts of the immigration system, but focusing on the point of immigration enforcement and interior, I would create on ramps for the undocumented to get documented. Whether that's a probationary status, whether it's a fine, whether — you know, whatever it is, I think that — or the idea that most Americans believe that the undocumented have some magic line that they could just get into to get documented. Or they could go down to the post office to get their papers. And so there's some reason that they're choosing not to get legal is a complete fallacy. Most of them cannot get documented. Your stories are very clear about the impacts of being undocumented or entering undocumented to the United States on the future ability of people to gain legal immigration status.

And so we need to think about that. Again, if I had my druthers, I would rather have the immigrant pay \$5,000 in a fine and 2 months of a temporary status to get back on the right side of the law from which they can move on to whatever other immigration system allows them to than pay quadruple that amount on an immigration enforcement system that is not having any of its desired impacts and having a whole lot of undesirable impacts.

So that's what I would do.

MS. BUTCHER: Great.

Raul Hinojosa, the magic wand is yours.

MR. HINOJOSA-OJEDA: It looks like we're building the consensus we need in Washington right here. And, you know, I do think we — the magic is in fact legalization of the currently existing folks and an increasing of legal flows. And these could be very similar efforts. Again, this notion of a North American visa, the idea is that they could be a five-year visa. People come in, they can buy it. If we want to create some type of auction for that.

By the way, guess what — we spend — the immigrants pay coyotes about as

much as the U.S. government pays for trying to stop the coyotes from doing their job. We're spending billions of dollars and we're feeding these criminal networks.

So, yes, we should have a five-year system. People can come in. And it's renewable if they want to stay here. And, by the way, many of them don't necessarily want to stay here long-term. In fact, that's why we're getting this reduction in net immigration, because people at the end of their lives are now going back. People are still coming in, but in many places in Mexico are now going back. We are getting new ones from southeast Mexico and Central America, and that's fine. We should create this system. Let them come in and if they want to choose to stay here permanently, there should be a pathway for that, for citizenship, but many of them don't necessarily want to do that and they can also choose to renew these visas for two, three times until that decision is made.

I think that that would create huge benefits.

MS. BUTCHER: That's great.

Alex Nowrasteh?

MR. NOWRASTEH: Increase legal immigration would be my number one magic want. If I want to reduce chaos along the border and the problem with unauthorized immigration, I would focus on increasing legal immigration for lower skilled and mid skilled workers from, you know, Central and South America and the Caribbean.

MS. BUTCHER: Terrific. Thank you so much.

I'd really like to thank our panelists for that thoughtful discussion. If you're in the Q&A and I didn't get to your questions, I'm so sorry about that. Hopefully there will be more opportunities for engagement.

Before we finish I'd like to ask one last question of the authors and then turn it over to Tara Watson for some concluding thoughts.

So, Kalee, why don't you go first and just tell us what is one thing you've learned while researching and writing this book that you'd like to leave us with?

MS. THOMPSON: Well, Theresa did a good job of touching on this, but I think

one thing was just how little knowledge so many people have about illegal immigration. And just like she said and we've discussed, it's like there's this sense that why didn't you just wait in line, why didn't you go through the proper channels, why didn't you apply for the correct paperwork. It's sort of a lack of understanding and this empathy for the situation that people really find themselves in.

And then the other thing is really just in the course of reporting this book and talking to people about it over many years, you just realize how integrated the undocumented community is into all of American life and into so many families. And, again, you see of course the stereotypical undocumented immigrant is a Latino person, but so many different families are dealing with immigration issues and coming up against just like a brick wall of the system. How do we solve these problems. And most people are motivated by doing what's right for their family, keeping their family together. And it's just very hard not to empathize with that.

MS. BUTCHER: Thank you.

Tara Watson, over to you. Same question, what's one thing you've learned. And then you can just transition into your concluding thoughts.

MS. WATSON: Great. I would say one thing that came across very clearly is there is no neat separation between the undocumented immigrant population and the general population. Seven percent of children in the U.S. have an undocumented parent and we can't talk about enforcement, and especially interior enforcement, and not think about the consequences for those children, the broader family, and the broader community.

Going into bigger picture here, I really appreciate the policy ideas from our panelists. What I would say right now we have a legislative vacuum. Congress really hasn't taken serious action on this question in a long time. And that leaves too much power, in my view, in the hands of the Executive Branch, it leaves too much power in the hands of ICE, it leaves too much power even in the hands of the individual police officer who is pulling someone over when they ran a stop sign. And we need to motivate Congress to take some action on this issue, to come to a bipartisan consensus where we can take into account the economics that

we've talked about today. That there's overwhelming evidence that immigration is good for the economy. There may be some negative impacts at the bottom of the income distribution, especially if we were to radically expand immigration. And that's something we need to keep an eye on and possibly develop policy tools in conjunction with expanding immigration to address, but we are not going to be able to move forward unless this is something that's legislatively solved rather than hoping that each new administration that comes into the White House will fix everything, because that's not a realistic solution.

I'll stop there. Thanks so much.

MS. BUTCHER: Well, thank you so much. I'd like to thank the many staff people behind the scenes who are making this event run smoothly. I'd like to thank our panelists for a stimulating discussion, and I'd really like to thank Tara Watson and Kalee Thompson for writing this fabulous book.

Thank you all.

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