

National Foundation for American Policy

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New Research Finds Immigrant Deaths at the Border Rising Due to Absence of Legal Avenues to Work

Second Study Finds Family-Sponsored Legal Immigrants Face Waits of 6 to 17 Years Due to Low Quotas

Arlington, Va. – The absence of a way to enter the United States legally to work has contributed to more than 4,000 men, women, and children dying while attempting to cross to America since 1998, concludes a new study released today by the National Foundation for American Policy (NFAP), an Arlington, Va.-based policy research group. Alarming, immigrant deaths increased in 2009 at a time when illegal entry fell significantly.

The study finds this death toll – an average of about one person a day – has occurred in the context of great pressure from Congress and executive branch officials to “control the border.” “The loss of life will almost certainly continue unless more paths are open to work legally in the United States,” said NFAP Executive Director Stuart Anderson, the study’s author. “The only plausible way to eliminate immigrant deaths at the border, as well as reduce illegal immigration in the long term, is to institute a new program of temporary visas or portable work permits for foreign workers.” Anderson served as head of policy and Counselor to the Commissioner of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (2001-2003) and worked as staff director of the Senate Immigration Subcommittee.

A second study, “Family Immigration: The Long Wait to Immigrate,” found family immigration quotas for legal immigrants are inadequate and result in separation and long waits for Americans, lawful permanent residents and close family members.

Both studies can be found on the NFAP website at www.nfap.com.

Approximately 4 million people are waiting in family immigration backlogs, according to data obtained from the U.S. Department of State and Department of Homeland Security. The wait time for a U.S. citizen petitioning for a brother or sister from the Philippines exceeds 20 years. A U.S. citizen petitioning for either a married (3rd preference) or unmarried (1st preference) son or

daughter (21 years or older) can expect to wait 6 to 17 years, depending on the country or origin. Research shows legal immigrants experience faster wage growth than natives, are more likely to start businesses and have higher median years of schooling. Raising family immigration quotas would serve both the humanitarian and economic interests of the United States, the study found.

Research for the papers was funded by a grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York.

In FY 1998, the Border Patrol had approximately 1.5 million apprehensions at the Southwest border, and there were 263 immigrant deaths. In FY 2009, Border Patrol apprehensions fell to 540,865 along the Southwest border but immigrant deaths rose to 417. In other words, an approximately 64 percent decline in illegal entry since 1998 has been accompanied by a 59 percent increase in immigrant deaths at the border. (Although an imprecise measurement, apprehensions data are considered good proxies for illegal entry.)

Pointing to a rise in immigrant deaths, the Congressional Research Service (CRS) concluded, "This evidence suggests that border crossings have become more hazardous since the 'Prevention through Deterrence' policy went into effect in 1995, resulting in an increase in illegal migrant deaths along the Southwest border."

Strong evidence exists that the current "enforcement-only" policy has strengthened criminal gangs, providing a profitable line of business for Mexican criminal enterprises. "If Mexican and Central American workers could come to America on a legal visa or work permit they would have no need to employ the services of a coyote or criminal enterprise," said NFAP's Stuart Anderson.

About the National Foundation for American Policy

Established in the Fall 2003, the National Foundation for American Policy (NFAP) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit, non-partisan public policy research organization based in Arlington, Virginia focusing on trade, immigration and related issues. The Advisory Board members include Columbia University economist Jagdish Bhagwati, Ohio University economist Richard Vedder and other prominent individuals. Over the past 24 months, NFAP's research has been written about in the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and other major media outlets. The organization's reports can be found at www.nfap.com.

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