



FEDERATION FOR AMERICAN IMMIGRATION REFORM

AMNESTY AND JOBLESSNESS

*15.4 Million Unemployed Americans Shouldn't
Have to Compete for Jobs with Today's Illegal Aliens*

A REPORT BY ZACH SWARTZ, GOVERNMENT RELATIONS ASSOCIATE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- American workers currently face the worst job market in a generation.
- The recent unemployment rate of 10.2 percent is the highest it has been in 25 years. Dating back to January 1948, unemployment has been higher than today's unemployment rate in just 11 out of 743 months.
- Regardless of gender, age, race, or education level, the unemployment picture for Americans today is worse than it was just one year ago.
- Today, more than 15.4 million Americans are without a job and are actively looking for work. At the same time, estimates conclude that 8.3 million illegal aliens are part of America's workforce despite their employment being a violation of U.S. law.
- Despite the worsening jobs trend, the Obama Administration and leaders in Congress are talking about passing legislation that would give amnesty to an estimated 12 million or more illegal aliens.
- The American job market today, compared to June 2007 when Congress last considered and rejected amnesty, is much, much worse. The official unemployment rate has increased from 4.6 percent to 10.0 percent. The number of unemployed has more than doubled, rising by 8.5 million.
- Amnesty would allow illegal aliens to keep jobs they should never have had, instead of freeing those jobs up for American workers.
- Amnesty would also allow those who are working illegally today in the underground economy to begin openly competing for scarce available jobs with Americans who are out of work.
- In short, Congress has a responsibility to ensure that available jobs are filled by legal workers. Consideration of amnesty legislation, particularly in these harsh economic times, constitutes a failure by Congress to live up to its basic responsibilities to the American people.

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INTRODUCTION

With the recent official unemployment rate of 10.2 percent, American workers are now facing the worst job market in 25 years.¹ In fact, over the past 60 years, the unemployment rate has rarely been as high as it is today. Despite a difficult job market, President Obama and leaders in Congress are talking about passing so-called “comprehensive immigration reform” legislation. This legislation would give amnesty to 12 million or more illegal aliens, including an estimated 8.3 million illegal aliens who hold jobs they never should have had, and could include a proposed new guest-worker provision to import hundreds of thousands of additional foreign workers.² If enacted, illegal aliens would be allowed to keep these jobs instead of making them available to American citizens and legal immigrants who are out of work. Congress has a responsibility to ensure that the law that requires available jobs to be filled by legal workers is respected. Consideration of amnesty, particularly in these harsh economic times, constitutes a failure by Congress to live up to its basic responsibilities to the American people.

AMERICAN WORKERS FACE HISTORICALLY HIGH UNEMPLOYMENT

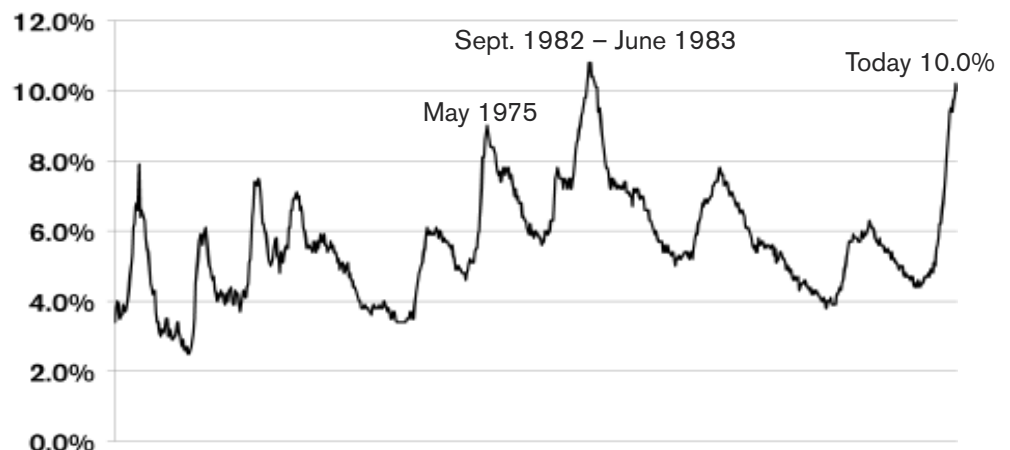
American workers are struggling. The number of available jobs continues to shrink. Today, 15.4 million Americans are out of work and looking for a job and millions more are in temporary part-time jobs while they look for permanent jobs.³ At the same time, it is estimated that 8.3 million illegal aliens are part of the American workforce despite not being legally authorized to work in the United States. In just the past year, 4.9 million jobs have been lost.

For months, leaders in Congress have been telling the American people that the U.S. economy is facing significant challenges. For example, during debate on President Obama’s \$800 billion stimulus bill, Senator Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) said that “The country is in tough shape. We have had the most difficult economic time since the Great Depression.”⁴ Since he made that remark in February, the economy and the job situation has continued its downward spiral. While today’s official 10.0 percent unemployment rate is nowhere near as bad as the 24.8 percent seen in 1933 during the depths of the Great Depression, the current employment picture is the worst Americans have seen in the past 25 years.

The adjacent chart, which shows America’s unemployment rate since 1948, demonstrates that over the past 61 years, American workers have faced an unemployment rate as high as it is today in just 11 out of the past 743 months.

The chart also shows that since January 1948, unemployment has

Unemployment Rate (Seasonal): 1948-2009



exceeded the current unemployment rate of 10.0 percent in just two periods: October 1982 to April 1983.⁵ Put in historic perspective, today's workers are facing an unemployment rate that has rarely been seen since World War II. The job market presents significant challenges for those Americans who are out of work and looking for a job.

AMNESTY ON THE HORIZON?

Despite the jobless picture, Senator Schumer, who recently compared today's economy to that of the Great Depression, chaired a hearing several months ago entitled "Comprehensive Immigration Reform in 2009, Can We Do It and How?" The hearing was held on April 30, 2009 before the Senate Judiciary Committee, Subcommittee on Immigration, Border Security and Refugees. Critics say that so-called "comprehensive" reform is a euphemism for legislation that would grant amnesty to 12 million illegal aliens and that this hearing was the first step towards consideration of amnesty in the 111th Congress.

While it comes as no surprise that Schumer would push amnesty, since he has supported it in the past, it is surprising that Congress would even consider amnesty given the current economic climate. Even people from Schumer's own state of New York recognize the reality that pushing amnesty with today's job market is unwise. For example, Rogan Kersh, a dean at New York University's Wagner School of Public Service, has stated that "rising unemployment rates, coupled with continuing dismal economic news, are battering the public's inclination to back a change in illegal immigrants' status, which was never that strong to begin with."⁶

Underlying Dean Kersh's comment is the fact that the American people intuitively understand that amnesty legislation would authorize illegal aliens to stay in the United States and allow them to keep jobs they should never have had in the first place. The American people understand that, rather than granting amnesty, Congress and the Administration should focus on immigration enforcement, which would progressively make available to legal American workers those jobs currently held by illegal aliens. Despite the lack of available jobs for legal American workers and the support of the American people for immigration law enforcement, Senator Schumer has said he will be undeterred by "difficult economic conditions" and will press ahead with the hearing, noting that there is "a real chance of passing comprehensive reform this year."⁷

AMNESTY'S MESSAGE: NO AMERICANS NEED APPLY

When Congress last considered amnesty in May and June 2007, some politicians suggested that illegal aliens were doing jobs that no Americans would do.⁸ That was not true then, and it certainly is not true today. Rep. Steve King (R-Iowa) has made just that point, saying that amnesty supporters "are going to have to be faced with the argument that I and many others are making: Illegals are taking jobs Americans now want."⁹ Amnesty would allow an estimated 8.3 million illegal aliens to keep the jobs they currently hold, even though they never should have been hired for those jobs in the first place. In addition, amnesty would allow anyone who is illegally present in the United States to openly begin applying for any and every available job in America. This

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would put American workers in the position of having to openly compete with (former) illegal aliens to fill an available job. American workers shouldn't have to do that, but amnesty would force them to.

The last time Congress rejected amnesty, in May and June 2007, America's economy was in much better shape than it is today. At that time, big business interests supported amnesty and President Bush's guest-worker program, which would have brought in hundreds of thousands of guest-workers each year. If the job market could not support those policies in 2007, there is no doubt that the current lack of available American jobs means that America simply cannot support these policies today.

The following table compares the unemployment data and jobless trends in June 2007 and today. It shows that during the 2007 amnesty debate, official unemployment (seasonal) stood at 4.6 percent — 4.9 full points lower than the current 10.0 percent. It also shows that in June 2007, nearly 7.0 million Americans were out of work, compared to 15.4 million today. In November 2009, 8.5 million more Americans are out of work and actively looking for a job than were in 2007.

American Unemployment Data: June 2007 vs. November 2009¹⁰

	June 2007	November 2009
Unemployment Rate	4.6 percent	10.0 percent
Number of Unemployed	7.0 million	15.4 million
Jobless Trend (compared to prior year)	+139,000	-5 million
Change in Unemployment Rate from Prior Year	-0.1 percent	+3.2 percent

During the last amnesty debate, the number of unemployed Americans declined by 139,000 during the year prior to the debate (comparing July 2006 to June 2007). Over that same one-year period, the unemployment rate had declined slightly from 4.7 to 4.6 percent. By comparison, America has had a net loss of nearly 5 million jobs during the previous one-year period (November 2008 to November 2009) and unemployment has increased by 3.2 percentage points. These numbers translate to a significantly higher number of Americans who are out of work today than were in 2007 (8.5 million more Americans) and suggests that America simply does not need more foreign workers, whether through amnesty, legalization or a guest-worker program. In fact, real enforcement and a reduction in immigration levels would ensure that America restores the integrity of its labor market which would increase wages and free jobs for American workers.

The unemployment numbers also demonstrate that regardless of gender, race, age or education, the employment prospects for all Americans are worse today than they were in June 2007. As the following chart demonstrates, women and men are both facing higher unemployment. In 2007, the unemployment rate for women stood at 3.9 percent; today it is 7.9 percent. Men also face higher unemployment. Unemployment was 4.1 percent for men in 2007 and is now 10.5 percent.

Unemployment Rates by Gender, Race, Age & Education: June 2007 vs. November 2009¹¹

	June 2007	November 2009
Adult Men	4.1%	10.5%
Adult Women	3.9%	7.9%
Whites	4.1%	9.3%
Hispanics	5.6%	12.7%
African Americans	8.5%	15.6%
Teenagers	16.1%	26.7%
Veterans		4.6% ¹²
Less Than High School Diploma (+25 years)	6.8%	15.0%
High School Diploma (+25 years)	4.2%	10.4%
Some College (+25 years)	3.6%	9.0%
College Grad or Higher (+25 years)	2.0%	4.9%

Regardless of race or national origin, Americans across the board are living with employment prospects today that are much worse than in 2007. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), white unemployment is up 5.2 percentage points (from 4.1 to 9.3 percent), Hispanic unemployment is up 7.1 percentage points (from 5.6 to 12.7 percent), and unemployment for African-Americans is up 7.1 percentage points (from 8.5 to 15.6 percent). Immigrant unemployment — mostly legal workers — in the first quarter of 2009 was even higher, i.e., 9.7 percent — the highest level since 1994, when data began to be collected for immigrants.¹³ Similarly, the teenage unemployment rate, having risen from 16.1 percent in June 2007 to 26.7 percent in November 2009, is also considerably higher. The teenage unemployment rate for African-Americans, at 49.4 percent, is even higher than the national average for all teenagers.

As with other demographics, job losses have hit Americans hard regardless of their level of educational attainment. According to BLS, workers over the age of 25 who have earned a college degree or higher have seen their unemployment rate more than double from 2.0 percent in June 2007 to 4.9 percent in November 2009. The unemployment rate for people with some college but without a degree has more than doubled from 3.6 percent to 9.0 percent, from June 2007 to November 2009.

The hardest hit, however, are those Americans older than 25 with “less than a high school diploma.” These Americans have seen their demographics’ unemployment climb from 6.8 percent to 15.0 percent, from June 2007 to November 2009. Those with a high school diploma but no college have seen unemployment increase from 4.2 percent to 10.4 percent. These numbers represent 1.8 million unemployed Americans without a high school diploma, and 3.9 million more with a high school diploma but no college.¹⁴



According to the Pew Hispanic Center, illegal aliens are “especially likely to hold low-skilled jobs” because they are “disproportionately likely to be poorly educated.”¹⁵ According to the Pew research, nearly half of all illegal aliens (47 percent) aged 25 to 64 have “less than a high school education,” compared to 8 percent of U.S.-born residents in that age group who have not graduated from high school. Americans who dropped out of high school or completed high school but never attended college will necessarily have to compete in the job market with any illegal alien who receives amnesty and anyone admitted under a new “no skill/low skill” “guest-worker program.” Americans with no more than a high school diploma, including 5.7 million Americans who are currently unemployed, are the most likely to be economically disadvantaged and are also most likely to be the hardest hit by amnesty or by a guest-worker program.

CONCLUSION

America’s unemployment numbers, taken as a whole, demonstrate an alarming trend for American workers. Unemployment is much higher today — across all demographics and regardless of gender, race, age or education level — than it was the last time Congress considered amnesty in June 2007. Amnesty would force those Americans out of work and looking for a job to compete with today’s illegal aliens for the limited number of jobs. The jobless numbers suggest that American workers cannot afford a guest-worker program and that American taxpayers cannot afford amnesty for millions of illegal aliens who would then become eligible for unemployment benefits. Despite this reality for the American worker, Congress has begun holding hearings on amnesty. But the conclusion is unavoidable: if consideration of amnesty was “ripe” in 2007, by today’s standards it is simply “rotten.”

MONTHLY HISTORIC UNEMPLOYMENT RATE
(1948 to 2009, Seasonally Adjusted)

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
1948	3.4	3.8	4.0	3.9	3.5	3.6	3.6	3.9	3.8	3.7	3.8	4.0
1949	4.3	4.7	5.0	5.3	6.1	6.2	6.7	6.8	6.6	7.9	6.4	6.6
1950	6.5	6.4	6.3	5.8	5.5	5.4	5.0	4.5	4.4	4.2	4.2	4.3
1951	3.7	3.4	3.4	3.1	3.0	3.2	3.1	3.1	3.3	3.5	3.5	3.1
1952	3.2	3.1	2.9	2.9	3.0	3.0	3.2	3.4	3.1	3.0	2.8	2.7
1953	2.9	2.6	2.6	2.7	2.5	2.5	2.6	2.7	2.9	3.1	3.5	4.5
1954	4.9	5.2	5.7	5.9	5.9	5.6	5.8	6.0	6.1	5.7	5.3	5.0
1955	4.9	4.7	4.6	4.7	4.3	4.2	4.0	4.2	4.1	4.3	4.2	4.2
1956	4.0	3.9	4.2	4.0	4.3	4.3	4.4	4.1	3.9	3.9	4.3	4.2
1957	4.2	3.9	3.7	3.9	4.1	4.3	4.2	4.1	4.4	4.5	5.1	5.2
1958	5.8	6.4	6.7	7.4	7.4	7.3	7.5	7.4	7.1	6.7	6.2	6.2
1959	6.0	5.9	5.6	5.2	5.1	5.0	5.1	5.2	5.5	5.7	5.8	5.3
1960	5.2	4.8	5.4	5.2	5.1	5.4	5.5	5.6	5.5	6.1	6.1	6.6
1961	6.6	6.9	6.9	7.0	7.1	6.9	7.0	6.6	6.7	6.5	6.1	6.0
1962	5.8	5.5	5.6	5.6	5.5	5.5	5.4	5.7	5.6	5.4	5.7	5.5
1963	5.7	5.9	5.7	5.7	5.9	5.6	5.6	5.4	5.5	5.5	5.7	5.5
1964	5.6	5.4	5.4	5.3	5.1	5.2	4.9	5.0	5.1	5.1	4.8	5.0
1965	4.9	5.1	4.7	4.8	4.6	4.6	4.4	4.4	4.3	4.2	4.1	4.0
1966	4.0	3.8	3.8	3.8	3.9	3.8	3.8	3.8	3.7	3.7	3.6	3.8
1967	3.9	3.8	3.8	3.8	3.8	3.9	3.8	3.8	3.8	4.0	3.9	3.8
1968	3.7	3.8	3.7	3.5	3.5	3.7	3.7	3.5	3.4	3.4	3.4	3.4
1969	3.4	3.4	3.4	3.4	3.4	3.5	3.5	3.5	3.7	3.7	3.5	3.5
1970	3.9	4.2	4.4	4.6	4.8	4.9	5.0	5.1	5.4	5.5	5.9	6.1
1971	5.9	5.9	6.0	5.9	5.9	5.9	6.0	6.1	6.0	5.8	6.0	6.0
1972	5.8	5.7	5.8	5.7	5.7	5.7	5.6	5.6	5.5	5.6	5.3	5.2
1973	4.9	5.0	4.9	5.0	4.9	4.9	4.8	4.8	4.8	4.6	4.8	4.9
1974	5.1	5.2	5.1	5.1	5.1	5.4	5.5	5.5	5.9	6.0	6.6	7.2
1975	8.1	8.1	8.6	8.8	9.0	8.8	8.6	8.4	8.4	8.4	8.3	8.2
1976	7.9	7.7	7.6	7.7	7.4	7.6	7.8	7.8	7.6	7.7	7.8	7.8
1977	7.5	7.6	7.4	7.2	7.0	7.2	6.9	7.0	6.8	6.8	6.8	6.4
1978	6.4	6.3	6.3	6.1	6.0	5.9	6.2	5.9	6.0	5.8	5.9	6.0
1979	5.9	5.9	5.8	5.8	5.6	5.7	5.7	6.0	5.9	6.0	5.9	6.0
1980	6.3	6.3	6.3	6.9	7.5	7.6	7.8	7.7	7.5	7.5	7.5	7.2

MONTHLY HISTORIC UNEMPLOYMENT RATE (continued)

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
1981	7.5	7.4	7.4	7.2	7.5	7.5	7.2	7.4	7.6	7.9	8.3	8.5
1982	8.6	8.9	9.0	9.3	9.4	9.6	9.8	9.8	10.1	10.4	10.8	10.8
1983	10.4	10.4	10.3	10.2	10.1	10.1	9.4	9.5	9.2	8.8	8.5	8.3
1984	8.0	7.8	7.8	7.7	7.4	7.2	7.5	7.5	7.3	7.4	7.2	7.3
1985	7.3	7.2	7.2	7.3	7.2	7.4	7.4	7.1	7.1	7.1	7.0	7.0
1986	6.7	7.2	7.2	7.1	7.2	7.2	7.0	6.9	7.0	7.0	6.9	6.6
1987	6.6	6.6	6.6	6.3	6.3	6.2	6.1	6.0	5.9	6.0	5.8	5.7
1988	5.7	5.7	5.7	5.4	5.6	5.4	5.4	5.6	5.4	5.4	5.3	5.3
1989	5.4	5.2	5.0	5.2	5.2	5.3	5.2	5.2	5.3	5.3	5.4	5.4
1990	5.4	5.3	5.2	5.4	5.4	5.2	5.5	5.7	5.9	5.9	6.2	6.3
1991	6.4	6.6	6.8	6.7	6.9	6.9	6.8	6.9	6.9	7.0	7.0	7.3
1992	7.3	7.4	7.4	7.4	7.6	7.8	7.7	7.6	7.6	7.3	7.4	7.4
1993	7.3	7.1	7.0	7.1	7.1	7.0	6.9	6.8	6.7	6.8	6.6	6.5
1994	6.6	6.6	6.5	6.4	6.1	6.1	6.1	6.0	5.9	5.8	5.6	5.5
1995	5.6	5.4	5.4	5.8	5.6	5.6	5.7	5.7	5.6	5.5	5.6	5.6
1996	5.6	5.5	5.5	5.6	5.6	5.3	5.5	5.1	5.2	5.2	5.4	5.4
1997	5.3	5.2	5.2	5.1	4.9	5.0	4.9	4.8	4.9	4.7	4.6	4.7
1998	4.6	4.6	4.7	4.3	4.4	4.5	4.5	4.5	4.6	4.5	4.4	4.4
1999	4.3	4.4	4.2	4.3	4.2	4.3	4.3	4.2	4.2	4.1	4.1	4.0
2000	4.0	4.1	4.0	3.8	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.1	3.9	3.9	3.9	3.9
2001	4.2	4.2	4.3	4.4	4.3	4.5	4.6	4.9	5.0	5.3	5.5	5.7
2002	5.7	5.7	5.7	5.9	5.8	5.8	5.8	5.7	5.7	5.7	5.9	6.0
2003	5.8	5.9	5.9	6.0	6.1	6.3	6.2	6.1	6.1	6.0	5.8	5.7
2004	5.7	5.6	5.8	5.6	5.6	5.6	5.5	5.4	5.4	5.5	5.4	5.4
2005	5.2	5.4	5.2	5.2	5.1	5.1	5.0	4.9	5.0	5.0	5.0	4.8
2006	4.7	4.8	4.7	4.7	4.7	4.6	4.7	4.7	4.5	4.4	4.5	4.4
2007	4.6	4.5	4.4	4.5	4.5	4.6	4.7	4.7	4.7	4.8	4.7	4.9
2008	4.9	4.8	5.1	5.0	5.5	5.6	5.8	6.2	6.2	6.6	6.8	7.2
2009	7.6	8.1	8.5	8.9	9.4	9.5	9.4	9.7	9.8	10.2	10.0	

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

Highlighted boxes indicate months where the unemployment rate was greater than today's unemployment rate.

ENDNOTES

- 1 When workforce dropouts, first-time job seekers and part-time job seekers looking for full-time jobs are added to the official unemployment rate, the rate of job seekers jumps to 15.6 percent in March according to the current data published by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. See Table U-6 at <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.t12.htm>.
- 2 Pew Hispanic Center, "A Portrait of Unauthorized Immigrants in the United States," April 14, 2009.
- 3 Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), "Employment Situation Summary," April 3, 2009, <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.nr0.htm>.
- 4 Senator Charles Schumer, (Congressional Record, S2293, February 13, 2009).
- 5 See Historic Monthly Unemployment Rate.
- 6 Bloomberg.com, "Economy May Force Obama to Abandon Plan to Overhaul Immigration," April 24, 2009 <http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601103&sid=avxmcRABpSlw&refer=us>
See also, Newsday.com, "Greenspan to Testify at Schumer's Immigration Hearing," April 22, 2009, <http://www.newsday.com/news/printedition/nation/ny-usimmi2312682734apr22,0,453118.story>
- 7 *Ibid.*
- 8 FoxNews.com, "Bush: America's Immigration System is Broken," May 30, 2007, <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,276114,00.html?sPage=fnc/us/immigration>. See also, National Review Online, "Jobs Americans Won't Do? Think Again," March 14, 2006, <http://www.nationalreview.com/lowry/lowry200603140822.asp>.
- 9 Bloomberg.
- 10 Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey," <http://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsatabs.htm>
- 11 *Ibid.*
- 12 By contrast, in March 2009 the unemployment rate for veterans who have served since 2001 was 7.3%.
- 13 Steven Camarota, "Trends in Immigrant and Native Employment," Center for Immigration Statistics, April, 2009.
- 14 Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Economic News Release: Table A-4. Employment status of the civilian population 25 years and over by educational attainment," April 3, 2009, <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.t04.htm>
- 15 Pew Hispanic Center, "A Portrait of Unauthorized Immigrants in the United States," April 14, 2009.

ABOUT FAIR

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