



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on October 30, 2014

Civil-rights Commissioner Says Obama Immigration Plan Will Hurt Black Workers

In an October 27 letter to President Obama, Peter Kirsanow, a member of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, said that the president's reported post-election plan to issue an executive order to grant legal status and work authorization to millions of illegal immigrants "will devastate the black community."



Kirsanow said that in addition to low-skilled black workers, the increased legal status will also have a negative effect on high-skilled STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) workers. He explained that his concerns were renewed after he learned about USCIS's (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services') draft solicitation projecting a potential "surge" in Permanent Resident Cards (PRC) and Employment Authorization Documentation (EAD) cards.

In our [October 20 article](#), we quoted the USCIS's pre-solicitation notice, which stated: "The requirement is for an estimated 4 million cards annually with the potential to buy as many as 34 million cards total."

In his letter to the president, Kirsanow said this vastly increased demand for green cards and work permits "suggests that USCIS expects to have a demand for 9 million to 14 million documents as a result of an executive amnesty or guest worker program."

Kirsanow continued:

Such an increase in lawful workers would have a deleterious effect on low-skilled American workers, particularly black workers. In 2008, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights held a briefing regarding the impact of illegal immigration on the wages and employment opportunities of African-Americans. The testimony at the briefing indicated that illegal immigration disproportionately impacts the wages and employment opportunities of African-American men.

Kirsanow's letter (which was heavily documented with footnote references) cited from testimony given by witnesses at his commission's 2008 briefing. He noted:

All the witnesses acknowledged that illegal immigration has a negative impact on black employment, both in terms of employment opportunities and wages. The witnesses differed on the extent of that impact, but every witness agreed that illegal immigration has a discernible negative effect on black employment.



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The witnesses had highly respected academic credentials and included Professor Gordon Hanson (who earned a Ph.D. in economics from MIT and holds the Pacific Economic Cooperation Chair in International Economic Relations at UC San Diego), Professor Gerald Jaynes (who earned a Ph.D. in economics from the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana and is now a professor of economics & African American studies at Yale), and Professor Vernon Briggs (who earned his Ph.D. in labor economics from Michigan State University and is emeritus professor of industrial and labor relations at Cornell University's ILR School).

In his letter to Obama, Kirsanow quoted from Professor Hanson's research showing that "Immigration ... accounts for about 40 percent of the 18 percentage point decline [from 1960-2000] in black employment rates." He also cited Professor Gerald Jaynes's research finding that illegal immigrants had displaced U.S. citizens in industries that had traditionally employed large numbers of African-Americans, such as meatpacking.

Kirsanow further cited Professor Briggs's writing that "illegal immigrants and blacks (who are disproportionately likely to be low-skilled) often find themselves in competition for the same jobs." Briggs had concluded that the huge number of illegal immigrants ensures that there is a continual surplus of low-skilled labor, thus preventing wages from rising.

Kirsanow copied Representative Marcia Fudge (D-Ohio), chair of the Congressional Black Caucus, with his letter. He and two other members of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights — Vice Chairwoman Abigail Thernstrom, and fellow Commissioner Gail Heriot — sent a joint letter to Fudge on April 11 warning that granting amnesty to the estimated 11 million illegal immigrants now living in the United States would negatively impact black workers.

"In light of recent debates on comprehensive immigration reform, we are writing to address a rarely-discussed effect of granting legal status or effective amnesty to illegal immigrants," Breitbart quoted the three commissioners as saying. "Such grants of legal status will likely disproportionately harm lower-skilled African-Americans by making it more difficult for them to obtain employment, and depressing their wages when they do obtain employment."

Kirsanow sent a previous letter to President Obama on August 5, that addressed the same factors as the latest letter the regarding the impact of illegal immigration on the wages and employment opportunities of African-Americans. Both letters referred to data from the Commission on Civil Rights' 2008 briefing, but since news of the USCIS's increase in green cards and work permits had not surfaced in August, Kirsanow did not address that point in the earlier letter. He focused instead on reports in the press that Obama was preparing to issue an executive order that would grant legal status and work authorization to millions of illegal immigrants.

Those expectations were quite realistic, at the time, since Obama had signaled his intention to alter immigration policy last June 30, when he directed [Department of Homeland Security] Secretary [Jeh] Johnson and Attorney General [Eric] Holder to identify additional actions he could take on his own (by means of executive actions) "to do what Congress refuses to do."

Even after the White House retreated in the face of political pressures and issued a statement on September 6 stating that President Obama "believes it would be harmful" to his immigration policy to announce any administrative action on immigration before this November's elections, the administration's agenda did not change — it was only delayed. The statement noted: "The President will take action on immigration before the end of the year."



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Speaking at the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute's 37th Annual Awards Gala in Washington on October 2, Obama assured this valuable constituency that he had not abandoned his commitment to change immigration policy by executive action:

I've said before that if Congress failed to live up to its responsibilities to solve this problem, I would act to fix as much of our immigration system as I can on my own, and I meant what I said. So this is not a question of if, but when.

When Breitbart broke the news of USCIS's mammoth green card request in October, the news outlet noted that while it is not unusual for federal agencies to plan for contingencies, the agency's card request specifically states that the surge is related to potential changes in immigration policy: "The Contractor shall demonstrate the capability to support potential 'surge' in PRC and EAD card demand for up to 9M cards during the initial period of performance to support possible future immigration reform initiative requirements."

Having learned much about the potential effect this immigration surge will have on the black workforce, Kirsanow was heavily armed with all the documentation he needed to make his case. Unfortunately, it is almost certain that this evidence will do nothing to change the mind of this president, whose own agenda has consistently trumped what is good for the nation.

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