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## Bill would ban Social Security credits for immigrants who worked illegally

**Associated Press**  
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MEXICO CITY -- For the 14 years he worked as an undocumented migrant in the U.S., Carmelo Rivera saw up to \$30 deducted each week from the \$300 to \$500 he earned as a vineyard worker. The deductions were supposed to pay for his retirement.

But like millions of other Mexicans who worked under false Social Security numbers, he is unlikely ever to see a penny of it.

In fact, if a group of congressmen has its way, undocumented migrants would be permanently barred from ever seeking to reclaim tens of billions they paid into Social Security. Instead, the money will go to fund American citizens' retirement.

Neither migrants nor their government appear to be fighting the issue, despite what's at stake: a little-known Social Security account called the "earnings suspense file," which grows at a rate of about \$6 billion a year and now stands at about \$376 billion.

The account is a sort of catchall for mismatched names and numbers, but is funded mostly by undocumented migrants, many of whom don't know the money exists.

Some see it as the price of working in America.

"People work under made-up [Social Security] numbers because they don't have any choice," said Rivera.

As for the lost funds--the only retirement savings for him and his wife--"that's just something you take in stride. It's part of the cost of the rules they have."

Many migrants are unaware they can get credit for past contributions, even if made under false numbers, if they later get legal residency and present receipts or pay stubs.

"It's not very common, and it is not necessarily very easy," said Mark Hinkle, a spokesman for the Social Security Administration in Washington.

Some migrants like Rivera fear being punished if they admit they worked illegally.

"We try to have as little contact with the authorities in the United States as possible," he said.

Hinkle says privacy rules bar his agency from reporting past visa violations to police. But some workers are using both false names and numbers, making it virtually impossible to ever prove a claim.

As difficult as the process already is, some lawmakers want to make sure no illegal migrants ever receive any Social Security. A bill submitted to the House last year by Rep. Dana Rohrabacher (R-Calif.) would "forbid any Social Security credits for illegal aliens or work [done] in violation of the terms of a visa."

The wages of undocumented workers are "illegitimate earnings, and whether some of that money is going into the suspense file is basically irrelevant," said Jack Martin of the Federation for American Immigration Reform.

Dan Griswold of the Cato Institute in Washington, a non-profit public policy research foundation that has worked to promote Social Security privatization, notes that "these people pay into the system, and few ultimately collect anything. These are some of the lowest-paid workers. They deserve to receive some kind of benefit from their contributions."

Griswold notes the migrants' payments are "gravy for Social Security" because the money from the suspense file is eventually rolled into the agency's general fund, where it helps finance pensions for American citizens.

Supporters of the ban say that when undocumented workers claim lost years of payments, they also build up more qualifying time for a pension, something that could add millions of low-paid workers to Social Security and add to projected Social Security shortfalls.

Indeed, earlier this year an advocacy group for senior citizens delivered about 125,000 signatures to congressmen urging them to "stop payment of our Social Security benefits to illegal aliens."

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