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RUBIO DISPUTES REPORT ON IMMIGRATION BILL COSTS

By Ashley Parker
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WASHINGTON — Senator Marco Rubio, Republican of Florida, aggressively pushed back Tuesday against a Heritage Foundation report that estimated new immigration legislation would cost taxpayers \$6.3 trillion by using the foundation's longstanding support for dynamic scoring — which takes into account projected economic growth when determining the cost of legislation — as a cudgel against it.

"Heritage, I think, is the king of dynamic scoring, and in many respects we've advocated for dynamic scoring here because of the positions that they've taken," Mr. Rubio, a chief author of the legislation, told reporters. "They are the only group that's looked at this issue and reached the conclusion they've reached. Everybody else who has analyzed immigration reform understands that if you do it, and we do it right, it will be a net positive for our economy."

The Heritage Foundation analysis released Monday found that the immigration legislation, which offers a pathway to citizenship for the 11 million illegal immigrants already in the country, would produce a "lifetime fiscal deficit" of at least \$6.3 trillion — an amount calculated by assuming that immigrants would receive \$9.4 trillion in government benefits and services, while paying only \$3.1 trillion in taxes.

Critics say the analysis does not account for the economic benefits that would arise from taking millions of people out of a shadow economy. A similar analysis by the conservative group helped scuttle earlier attempts at overhauling immigration laws.

Mr. Rubio is a protégé and close friend of Jim DeMint, the former South Carolina senator and new president of the Heritage Foundation. While Mr. Rubio's office has been reluctant to take on Mr. DeMint directly, he and his staff have spent weeks indirectly rebutting the Heritage Foundation's expected economic analysis, arguing that the public benefits of an immigration overhaul would outweigh any cost-related concerns.

With the Heritage study finally out, Mr. Rubio pressed his case even more forcefully.

"Their argument is based on a single premise, which I think is flawed," he said. "That is these people are disproportionately poor because they have no education and they will be poor for the rest of their lives in the U.S. Quite frankly, that's not the immigration experience in the U.S. That's certainly not my family's experience in the U.S."

Officials at the Heritage Foundation dismissed the criticism. "The dynamic scoring complaint is merely an attempt to distract from the entirely valid and incontrovertible finding of our report: that amnesty will cost taxpayers at least an additional \$6.3 trillion in government benefits," the organization said.

As part of Mr. Rubio's effort to shore up support for his immigration bill, he met in his Senate office Tuesday afternoon with about 20 grass-roots conservative leaders who are

largely supportive of the overhaul. Several attendees said Mr. Rubio had told them that he expected the bill that reaches the president's desk to be more conservative than the current legislation.

"He feels that in the markup and committee process, the bill probably needs to move to the right, not the left, and that it may move further to the right if it gets out of the Senate and over to the House," said Colin Hanna, president of Let Freedom Ring, a conservative grass-roots public policy organization.

On Thursday, the Senate Judiciary Committee will take up the legislation. As of Tuesday evening, the filing deadline for amendments, more than 50 (and counting) had been filed — including one from Senator Patrick J. Leahy of Vermont, the committee chairman, that would allow American citizens in committed long-term, same-sex relationships to sponsor their foreign partners for green cards.

Mr. Rubio had long anticipated the Heritage Foundation analysis and had taken pains to try to head it off. In a letter last month to David S. Addington, the group's vice president for research, Mr. Rubio urged the foundation to continue its history of "pro-growth economic policy and analysis" by using dynamic scoring when considering an overhaul of the nation's immigration laws.

"As I consider the potential impact of immigration reform, I am keenly aware that there will be budgetary impacts when illegal immigrants begin to access citizenship beginning 13 years after immigration reform is enacted," Mr. Rubio wrote.

"However, I also believe that immigration reform that shifts the mix of legal immigration away from family-based toward highly skilled/merit-based combined with bringing millions of undocumented aliens out of the underground economy will improve the labor market, increase entrepreneurship and create jobs, leading to a net increase in economic growth and reducing the deficit."

Mr. Rubio's argument, outlined in his letter, underscores an unlikely debate raging in conservative circles. Dynamic scoring has long been an article of faith among Republicans, who have used it to justify tax cuts, arguing that the cuts will add less to the federal deficit than estimated — or even pay for themselves — by spurring economic growth and generating tax receipts.

In fact, the Republicans considered it a coup in March when Senator Rob Portman, Republican of Ohio, successfully offered a nonbinding resolution that calls on the Congressional Budget Office and the Joint Committee on Taxation to produce a dynamic score when estimating tax legislation.