



## Fix Immigration So It Works for California

By Judy Ashley and Larry Rohlfses  
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Health care reform, economic stimulus, financial regulation, unemployment. With so many issues on the front burner in Washington, it's easy to lose sight of immigration reform. But whether lawmakers are paying attention or not, the immigration system remains broken - and the unwelcome consequences affect everyone in California.

Consequence Number One: California is home to an estimated 2.7 million unauthorized immigrants, according to a recent study by the Pew Hispanic Center. That's more than the population of Nevada. Many of them are working and contributing to the economy, but the fact that they are unauthorized makes a mockery of the law.

Consequence Number Two: a burgeoning network of illegal cottage industries that cater to these unauthorized workers, with ugly outcomes. For example, according to the Associated Press, two men were killed in a Southern California home in March. They were smuggling illegal immigrants and got into a fight over profits from their human cargo.

Consequence Number Three: the impact on the California economy - including potential obstacles to economic recovery.

Here is an example of what some employers are saying, despite the economic downturn. Shari Collins, a business owner in Moorpark, California, says that it's all but impossible to get enough labor for her landscape business. "Even with the unemployment numbers we're seeing today, the truth is we still can't find landscape construction or maintenance workers. My goal is to always employ Americans first, but without legal immigrants, my business simply can't survive during the busy summer season."

These and other unfortunate consequences point to a system that just doesn't work - for anyone in our state. It's a system created for a different time, and one that must be modernized.

That's why ImmigrationWorks USA, a broad array of business leaders throughout the nation, including California, is standing up in support of comprehensive immigration reform. The coalition represents virtually every economic sector in the nation - white-collar, blue-collar and "green-collar." But whether it's outdoors in the fields or in the clean rooms of Silicon Valley, the challenge is the same. We all have a stake in fixing the immigration system because it's holding back the state economy.

Many people assume that low-skilled immigrants take jobs from American workers. But actually the opposite is true.

If anything, many immigrant workers create jobs for Americans. Because immigrants are generally different from U.S. workers - sometimes less educated, sometimes more, often more willing to travel long distances for a short-term or seasonal job - the work they do generally complements and sustains employment for the native born.

According to testimony by Microsoft's Bill Gates before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Science and Technology in March of 2008, every visa for a high-skilled immigrant is linked to creation of five additional jobs in the U.S. Also, according to agricultural economists, every farm job, many of which are filled by foreign born workers, supports 3.5 non-farm jobs, which are typically filled by U.S. citizens. In other words, immigration is a job multiplier - the kind of job multiplier we desperately need to grow the economy and climb out of the recession.

What kind of immigration reform does California need from Washington? We endorse secure borders, more realistic immigration quotas and protection for employers who are trying to meet the demands of the law.

We also support better, smarter workplace enforcement. Employers want to be on the right side of the law. And we need Congress to create an accurate, reliable electronic system to verify that all of our employees are authorized to work. That's the only way to combat identity theft so that citizens and employers alike are protected from fraud.

Does that mean we endorse sanctions against employers? You bet. We support aggressive sanctions against businesses that deliberately flout the law - and will support them against those who continue to use unauthorized workers once more realistic immigration quotas are in place.

Bottom line: Congress must create a way for the foreign workers we need to keep California businesses open and growing to enter the country legally.

Our state's vast unauthorized workforce, the smuggling networks and forgery mills, the employers struggling to keep their businesses open and worrying about how to grow them as the economy picks up - the status quo is unacceptable.

In California, business leaders are standing up to demand change. We hope our leaders in Washington are listening, and we ask all Californians to let their members of Congress know that now is the time to fix this broken system. Let's make California great again!

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