

## ImmigrationWorks USA



*The business voice on immigration*

## TALKING POINTS ON TO THE HOUSE

The most effective thing you can do in a conversation with a member of Congress is tell your story. Lawmakers can read what the experts think, they can look up the facts. What no one else can do as well as you: make it real. Why does immigration reform matter to you, your workers and the economy where you do business?

Your most persuasive ammunition is your personal experience: how *your* business works, what steps you take to recruit American workers, why you hire immigrants, what immigrants contribute to your business, how they support other jobs at your company and at other businesses up and downstream in the local economy.

You may also want to touch on some of these more general points.

**A different approach.** Employers understand that the House will address immigration in its own way – on its own terms and in accordance with its own rules. But however the process unfolds, employers need a fix that addresses what’s broken about the legal immigration system. The heart of reform is fixing the immigration system so it works for America in the future, admitting the immigrants we need and preventing future illegal immigration.

**Why we need less-skilled immigrants.** In order to remain globally competitive, the U.S. needs sustained economic growth. Economists agree that growth requires two critical ingredients: innovation and a growing labor force. The U.S. workforce has changed dramatically in recent decades. As Americans become better educated, employers have increasing difficulty finding workers to fill low-skilled jobs. In 1950, more than half of American workers were high school dropouts willing to do physically demanding, low-skilled work. Today the figure is less than 5 percent. But many U.S. businesses still need less-skilled workers to meet customers’ needs and remain competitive.

**The heart of immigration reform.** Employers who rely on less-skilled immigrants need Congress to create a temporary worker program so they can fill jobs when there are no willing and able Americans. Without this critical labor force, the hospitality, construction, food processing and food service industries would all be severely hobbled and in some regions come close to collapse.

**What’s at stake.** Without a workable temporary visa program, the nation can have no hope of ending illegal immigration. An overwhelming majority of the 11 million unauthorized immigrants living in the U.S. today would rather be here legally. They came and stayed illegally only because there was no lawful way for them to enter the country and work. And if we fail to create a legal way for less-skilled workers to come to the U.S. in the future, in 10 or 20 years we’re going to find ourselves in exactly the same predicament – wondering what to do about a *new* 11 or 12 or who knows how many million unauthorized immigrants.

**Enforcement is a three-legged stool.** How do we prevent another wave of unauthorized immigration? Intensified border enforcement will help control the flow. So will better workplace enforcement – an effective electronic employment verification system. But ultimately, the best antidote to illegal immigration is a legal immigration system that works, meeting unmet U.S. labor needs with an adequate supply of foreign workers.

**A market-driven program robust enough to divert the illegal flow.** A new temporary worker program should respond in real time to changing U.S. labor needs, growing in good years when the economy needs more foreign workers and shrinking in down times when more Americans are out of work. It should also be robust enough to divert and rechannel the existing influx of illegal immigrants. Every year from 2003 to 2009, more than 350,000 unauthorized immigrants entered the U.S. to fill jobs for which there were not enough willing and able Americans. A program that cannot absorb and accommodate this flow will not succeed in ending illegal immigration.

**Picking economic winners and losers.** The temporary worker program in the Senate immigration reform bill singles out the construction industry for a special quota within a quota: no more than 15,000 workers a year, no matter how healthy the economy. This restriction would severely limit construction growth in years ahead – just as the industry is poised to take off and drive the rest of the economy to full recovery. The House must remedy this mistake.

**Restoring the rule of law in the workplace.** No one has more of a stake than employers in restoring the rule of law in the workplace. The overwhelming majority want to be on the right side of the law – it's their obligation as citizens, and it makes good business sense. The Legal Workforce Act recently passed by the House Judiciary Committee gives employers the tools they need to verify the work authorization of new employees. It replaces an unworkable patchwork of state laws with a single national policy. And it levels the playing field for law-abiding business owners, protecting them from unscrupulous competitors.

**A humane, practical answer for unauthorized workers.** Most unauthorized immigrants are otherwise law-abiding and doing needed work – jobs that bolster U.S. prosperity and create jobs for Americans up and downstream in the local economy. No one realistically believes we can deport these workers and their families. We should give them a chance to earn their way onto the right side of the law.

**Time to act.** Our broken immigration system is not a problem that can be put off. If we don't make it easier for foreign knowledge workers to come to the U.S. and build lives, we will fall behind our global competitors, and the technological change of the next decades will occur elsewhere. If we don't create a legal way for less-skilled immigrants to enter the country and work, we won't restore the rule of law – and will all but guarantee that millions more come to the U.S. illegally in years ahead. If we don't come up with an answer for young people brought to the U.S. illegally as children, we will squander the talent of a generation. The stakes could hardly be higher. We need Congress to act.

*ImmigrationWorks USA is a national federation of employers working to advance better immigration law. The network links major corporations, national trade associations and 25 state-based coalitions of small to medium-sized business owners concerned that the broken immigration system is holding back the nation's economic growth. Their shared aim: legislation that brings America's annual legal intake of foreign workers more realistically into line with the country's labor needs.*