



THE SMALL BUSINESS CASE FOR REFORM

Employers want reform. No one has more of a stake in fixing the broken immigration system than employers who rely on immigrant workers. We count on immigrants, working alongside Americans, to keep our businesses open and contributing to the economy. And we need reform that provides a practical, legal way for these valued employees to enter the U.S.

We need immigrant workers. The economic downturn has done nothing to change the demographic and educational trends that make foreign workers an essential ingredient of American prosperity. American families are shrinking. Baby boomers are retiring. Americans are more educated – many too educated to want to do unskilled physical work. But we still don't educate enough doctors or scientists. Even with today's high unemployment, employers in many sectors – agriculture, high-tech, the seasonal economy – need immigrants to keep their operations running. And as the economy improves, that need will only grow – both global talent and less-skilled manpower will play an essential role in the nation's economic recovery.

Immigrants are good for the economy. Employers should make every effort to hire Americans first. But in fact, far from competing with Americans or taking jobs, most immigrants help create jobs for the native-born. Foreign-born scientists, engineers and entrepreneurs help the U.S. remain the most dynamic knowledge economy in the world. And less skilled immigrants too help create and sustain jobs for Americans: the unskilled farmhand who helps the dairy stay open by doing dirty work no one else in town wants to do supports jobs for the operation's foreman, its manager, its accountant and many other businesses up- and downstream in the local economy.

The problem. Right now, there is no way for many needed workers to enter the country legally. There's virtually no program for an unskilled Mexican with no family here who wants to work year-round in a non-farm job. Temporary and seasonal programs require so much red tape that many employers cannot use them. Even programs for skilled immigrants are too small to fill U.S. needs, and talented workers who can't get in often go instead to countries that compete with us. For employers, this is the crux of immigration reform – creating a worker-visa program that works.

Employers support enforcement. The overwhelming majority of employers who rely on immigrant workers want to be on the right side of the law. After all, we've invested everything we've got in our businesses, and the last thing we want is to put them at risk by breaking the law. We make every effort to hire a legal workforce. We support effective workplace enforcement. And we count on the government to maintain a level playing field, punishing bad-actor employers who deliberately break the law.

We're counting on Congress to get it right. Employers are encouraged to see immigration rising back to the top of the national agenda. The sooner Congress fixes the broken system, the better. But the push for reform must be bipartisan – that's the only way to produce a balanced bill that works for all Americans, and it's the only way to find the votes we'll need to get over the finish line. A partisan effort to play politics with immigration would be worse than nothing and could set back the cause for years to come.

Fix it now! The best – the only – way to control illegal immigration is to create a legal immigration system that works. We need to create a program that allows more immigrants to enter the country legally so that employers like us who want to do the right thing can hire legal workers.