

## ImmigrationWorks USA



*The business voice on immigration*

### CAPITOL HILL BRIEFING

# IMMIGRATION IN AMERICA'S INTEREST

In March 2018, as debate about limiting legal immigration swirled in Washington DC, ImmigrationWorks USA organized a briefing for congressional staffers. The topic: how to design immigration policy to serve American interests – American workers, American employers and the American economy. Panelists included a senior labor economist from the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas, two employers who rely on immigrant workers and a Washington consultant with long experience in the immigration policy debate. IW president Tamar Jacoby moderated the discussion.

**MODERATOR Tamar Jacoby** president, ImmigrationWorks USA



*"President Trump gets one thing 100 percent right: the nation needs an immigration policy that serves American interests. Immigrant rights are important – we can't ignore human rights. But ultimately American immigration policy has to be based on American interests: what's good for us – our economy and our society. What isn't so clear: what exactly are America's interests when it comes to immigration? Most pressingly, what are our interests today – a time of record low unemployment almost everywhere in the country?"*

**Pia Orrenius** vice president and senior economist, Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas

**Immigrants and economic growth.** *"There's no way to grow economically without an adequate labor force. The problem is that labor force participation has been declining since 2000, mostly because of baby boom retirements – and this will only get worse in the next two decades. There won't be enough new workers entering the economy to offset retirements, so we'll lose a net 8 million U.S.-born workers. The only way to grow the labor force during this period will be immigration, and if we cut the number of immigrants, it will have a direct impact on U.S. economic growth."*



**Competition between immigrants and American workers.** *"Many people think if you give a job to an immigrant, you take one away from an American-born worker. But economic research doesn't support that. The economy isn't a fixed pie. Immigration stimulates investment and grows the economic pie, creating more jobs for American-born workers."*

**'Merit-based immigration.'** "President Trump talks about 'merit-based immigration.' But that begs the question: what's merit? Can the government decide what has 'merit?' Speaking as an economist, my response is no. The best sign that an immigrant has merit is an employer willing to hire them."

**Dean Jagusch** president, Wagner Roofing Company, Hyattsville, MD

"I own a roofing company with about 50 employees. Of those 50, only three make less than \$20 an hour. But we still have a hard time getting employees in the door. Roofing isn't an attractive industry for many workers. It's hard work, sometimes it's cold work, sometimes it's hot work. But many immigrants view it as an opportunity for a career."



"If we had the labor force, we could do 15 to 20 percent more work a year – and that would create more managerial positions for American workers."

**Dana English** vice president, Real Hospitality Group, Ocean City, MD

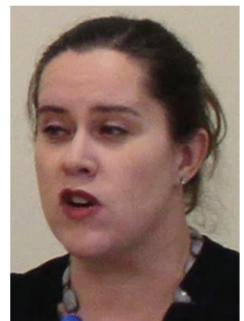


"We run 90 hotels and employ 3,000 people. As the economy has improved, it's gotten harder and harder to fill seasonal positions. We go to job fairs, we advertise on social media, we do everything we can to reach American workers. But there's still a gap between what we need and what we get."

We pay our seasonal immigrant workers the same as we pay American workers – and incur the additional cost of a hiring agency. But it's a necessity for us: our immigrant workers keep our hotels open, supporting jobs for Americans at the hotels and other companies – our vendors and suppliers."

**Jenna Hamilton** partner, Capitol Legislative Strategies

"It's a new argument in Congress – the argument for cutting legal immigration. The truth is in today's economy – an economy that's going to grow faster now after tax reform – we need more legal immigration, including less-skilled immigration."



"I work with the residential construction industry. And in recent months, we've started to see builders – particularly in the Southeast – sending trucks around every morning to their competitors' build sites. They approach the framing and roofer teams and ask, 'How much are you getting paid? We'll pay you 20 percent more to come with us.' And these shortages are only going to get worse as the economy improves."

ImmigrationWorks USA is a national federation of employers working to advance better immigration law. The network links major corporations, national trade associations and state-based coalitions of small to medium-sized business owners concerned that the broken immigration system is holding back the nation's economic growth.