



TAKE THE CHANCE TO ALIGN IMMIGRATION POLICY WITH ECONOMIC NEEDS

By Dennis Nixon and Rafael Anchia
July 1, 2012

In delivering the decision on *United States vs. Arizona*, the Supreme Court has opened the door of opportunity to fixing our broken federal immigration system. The ruling also proved that state-based reforms might make people feel better, but they won't solve the problem and they will continue to invite more litigation, further polarizing the country.

Recent history has shown that local and state-based anti-immigrant actions leave bad economic outcomes in their wake. Ask the people of Riverside, N.J.; Manassas, Va.; and the states of Alabama, Georgia and Arizona, who did not take into account the economic consequences of their actions before passing anti-immigrant ordinances and laws.

While enforcement is a major component of immigration and border security, we can never enforce our way out of this problem. The reality is that our legal immigration system is broken, and we cannot truly reduce illegal entries into the U.S. until we repair that pipeline.

Last session, the Texas Legislature wisely defeated an attempt to use state power to discourage immigrants from settling in Texas, as Arizona and other states have tried to do. As the leading state in the country in which to do business, we pride ourselves on a successful track record of job creation. However, this will last only as long as there are workers to fill those jobs. There are 10 to 15 million more baby boomers leaving the workforce than there are workers entering to replace them.

The demographic trends for America and the world cry out for positive immigration policies that will keep our economy growing. That's why the path forward starts with policies that will help many of the industries experiencing worker shortages.

We need an immigration and visa system that will serve the best interests of Texas and continue to attract the best companies and jobs to a business-friendly state, all the while working together to fix our broken federal immigration system.

We educate the best and brightest from around the world at our universities, and when their student visas expire, we show them the door. Many of these students are now returning home to compete against us. We should be stapling a green card to their diplomas and inviting them to stay and give back to the country that gave them an opportunity.

This issue has been highlighted by New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg and the bipartisan Partnership for a New American Economy in a report they released this May, "Not Coming to America: Why the U.S. Is Falling Behind in the Global Race for Talent."

The benefits immigrants add to our economy are profound. Immigrants are twice as likely as native-born Americans to start a business. In areas where our economy needs workers to compete globally and grow at both the low- and high-skilled end, immigrants are disproportionately represented.

The federal government estimates that even with high unemployment, there are 3 million unfilled jobs in this country. If we can bring in the right workers to fill these jobs, companies will grow and more jobs for American workers will be created.

Many economists think that each foreign-born graduate with an advanced degree from a U.S. university who stays here to work in a STEM field (science, technology, engineering or mathematics) in turn creates four American jobs.

The world has changed, and we must adapt. For centuries, people moved to where the jobs were. Today, jobs move to where the talent is. In a talent-based economy, countries that get the workers they need will thrive – while the rest will fall behind.

If we are smart about it, immigration policy is a way to ensure we get the talent we need. So while other states may look to the ruling as a way to make immigrants feel unwelcome, Texas should see the decision as an opportunity to finally bring our federal immigration policy in line with our economic needs.

Our state has long depended on the ingenuity and hard work that immigrants provide. We need immigration policies that acknowledge the contributions that immigrants will make in the future and that will keep Texas “open for business.”

Dennis Nixon is CEO and chairman of IBC Bank and a member of the Partnership for a New American Economy. State Rep. Rafael Anchia, D-Dallas, serves District 103 in the Legislature.