

## PROSPERITY IN THE WILD WEST OF IMMIGRATION REFORM

By Dino Cervantes and Antonio Maestas  
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The recent decision by the U.S. Supreme Court has the potential to open the door to misguided and expensive state-based immigration proposals, and may increase the possibility of one-upmanship we have already seen in Arizona, Alabama, South Carolina, and several other states who are vying for the title of least friendly to undocumented immigrants.

But this doesn't have to be the case. Pragmatic and responsible state-based immigration reforms can make a difference for economies and prosperity while also spurring a much-needed federal overhaul of our nation's outdated immigration laws.

Experience shows that local control of immigration reform can and often is a good thing, allowing cities and states to attract the workers and talent they need to power industry and innovation right here in America. Our neighbor to the north, Canada, allows each of its regions to designate workers based on the needs of local economies – needs that might include filling a nursing shortage, finding tech industry entrepreneurs, or recruiting experienced agricultural workers to pick valuable crops that must be harvested by hand.

Similar flexibility is needed in U.S. immigration law. That's exactly what New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg and the bipartisan Partnership for a New American Economy recently called for in their recent report, "Not Coming to America: Why the U.S. Is Falling Behind in the Global Race for Talent."

It's no surprise that there's a connection between welcoming immigrant workers and entrepreneurs and economic growth. Forty eight percent of New York City's small businesses are owned by immigrants. Similar stories exist in Los Angeles and Chicago – all cities which have managed to weather the economic downturn far better than Alabama and Arizona, which have seen their state economies falter even as they have cracked down on immigrants.

States should use their immigration laws to help build the workforce they need to be competitive in an increasingly global economy that depends on highly-skilled, college-educated workers. They should encourage students to go to college and pursue growth fields like science, technology, engineering, and math. They should make it easier for entrepreneurs to come here and start businesses that will create jobs for all Americans. And they should find ways to use immigration to meet these needs and fill gaps in their economies, especially in labor-intensive areas like farming and meat packing, to help drive our local industries.

And filling gaps creates jobs. For every foreign student who graduates with an advanced degree from a U.S. university and stays and works in science, technology, engineering, or math, more than two additional American jobs are created, according to recent economic analysis by the American Enterprise institute and the Partnership for a New American

Economy. Foreign workers who come to the U.S. to fill a need in our hotels, meatpacking plants, or other labor-intensive industries create even more American jobs.

As we continue to navigate a sluggish recovery, we would do better to welcome immigrants as engines of economic growth than pursue economically damaging enforcement-only policies. In short, we need to think of immigration as a part of our broader economic strategy, similar to how we think of infrastructure, education, taxation, or research and development.

Following in the footsteps of Arizona and trying to remove all undocumented workers not only would fail to create jobs for Americans, but would even take them away. Many farms in states with harsh immigration laws have already had to switch to crops that can be picked by machines because they can't find workers. These crops bring in less revenue for the economy, create fewer jobs, and remove immigrant workers whose economic contributions in turn create other jobs for American workers. Similarly, Arizona's harsh law resulted in a dramatic downswing in its convention and tourism industry, depriving the state of jobs and revenue. Laws like Arizona's are also expensive, imposing high costs on state taxpayers since they require police to double as immigration agents, more jails to hold immigrants for longer periods, lawyers to defend against lawsuits, and many other expenses. It comes as no surprise that Georgia and Alabama are already working to find ways to undue parts of their tough laws because of the severe costs to their local economies.

We can and should enforce our laws – but we should not cut off our own nose to spite our face. We should be working with groups like the Progressive States Network, ImmigrationWorksUSA, and the Partnership for a New American Economy, all of whom are promoting smart immigration reforms that can lead to American jobs today.

The Supreme Court has left the states with a unique opportunity to craft policies that help their economies and create American jobs. Let's be smart about how we use it.

*Dino Cervantes is the president of the New Mexico Chile Association.*

*Antonio Maestas is a member of the New Mexico House of Representatives from the 16th District.*