



## Immigration Reform

### **Problem:**

Current and projected demographic and sociological changes to the United States workforce underscore an urgent need for workers in all aspects of the national economy. The workforce available to perform manual labor is aging rapidly, while the shortage of high tech workers is well documented. Our immigration system is not meeting the needs of employers. The country is not producing enough highly skilled experts in fields that are essential to American competitiveness, stunting job creation and constraining innovation and continued economic growth.

Our current immigration laws fail to provide U.S. employers with the ability to recruit and retain the talented workers that they need. As a result, companies like Microsoft are being forced to consider moving facilities to Canada and other nations that have sufficient workers or an adequate guest worker program. At the same time, experts estimate there are as many as 12 million out of status workers in the country working hard in agriculture, construction, and the restaurant industry, to name a few. Without these workers our crops would rot in the fields and our service industry would grind to a halt. The combination of a need for workers and an inadequate immigration system is limiting our economic growth and our global ability to compete with other countries with more attentive immigration policies.

### **Background:**

Congress has failed to act to reform our immigration system. In August 2007, the Bush administration announced a 26-point administrative immigration reform plan that it has pursued in view of congressional inaction. Provisions in the plan include increased border security, a controversial employer “No- Match Safe Harbor” rule, and enhancements to the H-1B, H-2A, and H-2B guest worker programs. All of these initiatives face opposition, and fall far short of what is needed to meet employers’ needs. Federal legislative action is necessary to address the critical shortfalls in our immigration laws.

**Solution:** Washington State’s entire representation – from local authorities to the Governor’s office to the congressional delegation – must work to ensure that the federal government enacts meaningful reform, both as an emergency measure in the interim and as a long term matter for the economic health of our country. The government must:

1. Create a carefully monitored federal guest worker program to fill the growing gaps in America's workforce recognizing that, in some cases, permanent immigrants will be needed to fill these gaps.
2. Ensure the continuity and expansion of H-1B and L-1 visas for professionals and highly skilled workers.
3. Modernize student visa programs to make our colleges and universities more attractive, so that we can recruit the best and brightest throughout the world to study in the U.S. and contribute to our future growth.
4. Adopt an “essential worker pilot program” that will assist in providing employers with a legal and stable workforce, after local workers are offered employment.
5. Reform the I-9 process by providing flexible identity/employment eligibility standards that do not overburden the employer. Employers should not be held liable when workers present fraudulent employment documents.