

Immigration Reform

Background:

While past presidential administrations have voiced support for various forms of immigration reform, Congress has repeatedly failed to act to reform our immigration system. Although the Obama administration voices support for comprehensive immigration reform, a clear proposal has yet to emerge in Congress and appears to be delayed until 2010. Meanwhile, efforts are underway to increase enforcement against employers and litigation continues over the controversial e-verify program.

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.

Solution:

1. Create a carefully monitored federal guest worker program to fill the growing gaps in America's workforce, ensure the viability and integrity of existing temporary non-immigrant visa programs, and allow employers flexibility on the basis of labor market needs.
2. 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.
3. Adopt an "essential worker pilot program" that will assist in providing employers with a legal and stable workforce, after local workers are offered employment.
4. Reform the employee verification process by establishing clear, consistent standards that promote a legal workforce while protecting employers from undue costs and unrealistic demands.