

Benefits of an Immigration Fix

By Charles C. Foster | July 7, 2014 | Updated: July 7, 2014 6:54pm

Every day, hundreds of undocumented immigrants join the thousands who have been flooding our Rio Grande Valley border, which is now becoming one of the largest humanitarian crises in recent memory.

Within the past nine months, authorities have detained 160,000 undocumented immigrants, including more than 33,000 unaccompanied minors, attempting to gain unlawful entry into the United States.

Unfortunately it is our failing immigration system that is encouraging these men, women and children to believe they can walk across the border to a new life in America. As Americans, we understand the law.

We know that there is a visa system in place and an application process for immigrants to become citizens. However, most Americans do not realize that we have a very highly restrictive legal system and for most, there are few if any legal options.

It was only in 1968 that Congress imposed quotas on the Western Hemisphere, eventually reducing the worldwide quota to 5,000 for semi-skilled immigrants seeking to immigrate to the United States for employment. That quota includes immediate family members. Backlogs under the quota for family members of close relatives of U.S. citizens and legal residents are as long as 10-20 years. Nor is there a viable temporary-worker program.

Last June, the U.S. Senate did its due diligence in bringing the nation closer to having a set of clear, enforceable and fair immigration laws with its comprehensive bill. This bill would address future needs by enhancing border security and expanding foreign-worker programs, while addressing the present by creating a pathway to legal residence and/or citizenship for the estimated 12 million undocumented immigrants living in the U.S.

Increasing the allotment of visas distributed each year would have a significant and beneficial impact on our economy.

Innovation and investment would both increase due to the growth of a more diverse, high-skilled workforce, which would allow advanced sectors, such as the tech industry, to have access to the qualified applicants it needs.

According to a study by Regional Economic Models Inc., an expansion to H-1B visas, similar to what is outlined in the Senate's bill, would create 20,400 jobs in Texas and increase the gross state product by more than \$2 billion - and that is just in one year.

The study also found that a pathway to legalization for undocumented immigrants would create more than 14,600 jobs and increase the gross state product by more than \$1.2 billion in

just one year alone. Such pathways would include verifying employment, checking criminal backgrounds and paying back taxes, among other things.

Passing much-needed immigration reform would allow the United States to effectively manage its immigration system from the outside in, while putting into place a standard for legal entry for future immigrants to follow. The current system is failing by almost every measure.

It is up to our leaders in the House to resolve this issue. I hope that Congress will stand up for Texas and see immigration reform addressed this year. Lawmakers in Washington cannot continue to kick the can down the road on this very important issue.

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