



# Immigration Reform: It's a Heartland Issue

By: Rick Poore – April 4, 2013

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I run a small business in Nebraska. So I'll probably raise some eyebrows when I say I've got immigration on my mind.

A lot of people think of immigration as a "border state" issue. You know, only important to states like Texas and Arizona. Well, unless your definition of "border state" takes into account Nebraska's border with our southern neighbors in Kansas, I disagree. Immigration isn't just a border state issue. It's a heartland issue. Born and raised here in Nebraska, and now running a small business here, I see immigration playing a big role in rebuilding local economies in rural Nebraska. You can't get more heartland than here. Just look at Crete, a town 20 miles from Lincoln where I have my business. Crete's story shows how immigrants are revitalizing smalltown economies that otherwise would have dried up and disappeared.

Crete's meatpacking plant depends on an immigrant workforce. But the role of immigrants in the Crete economy is bigger than that. Immigrants are not only workers, they're also the people who are starting and running new businesses and creating local jobs. And they represent a growing economic force – buying houses, spending money, and building the tax base. Immigrants are giving Crete a new economic future.

So, as a heartland small business owner looking at the choices our country faces on immigration reform, I want to know: what's going to help small businesses? What's going to create the most jobs and boost rural economies? What's going to create more successes like Crete?

Taking a common sense small business approach to this issue, the answer to what kind of immigration reform will do the most to boost our local economies seems pretty clear: reform with a roadmap to citizenship and a commitment to strong families.

Our rural communities need more people who want to build a future here, people who want to buy homes, send their kids to school, start businesses, contribute. That's what so many aspiring Americans want to do, if only given the opportunity. A roadmap to citizenship – not some half-way "solution" that leaves immigrants in a permanent second-class limbo – is the way to make that opportunity real.

Now, there are some politicians who like to rile people up with inflammatory "deport 'em all" rhetoric. God knows we have plenty of them here in Nebraska. But let's be honest: doing that would be denying small towns across rural Nebraska – Grand Island, Scottsbluff, Lexington, Crete, and many others – an opportunity to build a new economic future. If we don't open the doors of opportunity for workers and would-be small business owners who want to contribute to our rural communities, pay taxes, raise

families, and start businesses... if we don't do that, these communities will slowly fade away like so many small towns I knew as a kid that have all but disappeared today. No local grocery store, no restaurant or tavern, schools closed and consolidated with other struggling communities.

Denying new Americans the opportunity to earn citizenship would be foreclosing on the economic futures of whole communities across the rural heartland. We've always been a land of opportunity. That's what America is built on. It's what makes our country great. Do we want to stop now?

It seems like common sense to me that immigration reform with that roadmap to citizenship will give the biggest boost to our local economies. Research from respected conservative sources confirms this: a paper published by the Cato Institute last year found that reform with a roadmap to citizenship would add \$1.5 trillion to the U.S. economy over 10 years – nearly twice the economic benefits of reform with no pathway to citizenship.

Crete, Nebraska is a town where business leaders, schools, and community members are working together to build a strong local economy and a bright future for their community. We need more success stories like Crete. That's why the American heartland needs immigration reform with a roadmap to citizenship.

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