



# Immigration reform can power U.S. economy

Spencer Abraham and Carlos Gutierrez

October 6, 2013

Immigration reform is a secret weapon that can help unleash the full power of the U.S. economy.

Except that it's not really much of a secret. Study after study has shown what revamping our outdated immigration system can do. The CATO Institute estimates that comprehensive immigration reform would increase U.S. gross domestic product by \$1.5 trillion over 10 years. The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office believes that it would trim the federal deficit by \$135 billion over the same time period.

Analysis published by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce indicates that a pathway to citizenship for undocumented workers — which would unleash their full contribution to our economy — would create 123,000 new jobs for U.S. citizens in 2014, increasing to 594,000 jobs by 2018. Additionally, it would increase GDP by more than \$10 billion the first year, and by almost \$50 billion four years later.

In Michigan, one study found that the pathway to citizenship would increase the gross state product by more than \$800 million in 2020, while adding almost 10,000 new jobs for Michiganders. Just expanding the availability of H1B visas for high-skilled immigrants would create 5,600 new jobs in the first year, and increase the Michigan GSP by more than \$500 million.

That is the potential. Here is what we have today.

Our broken immigration policies deny businesses — from farms to contractors to cutting edge high-tech companies — the employees they need to compete, expand and create more jobs for all American workers.

Current immigration statutes do not give law enforcement agencies a realistic method of dealing with the 11 million undocumented workers living among us.

The years of ineffective security strategies perpetuated by present day immigration laws have created a porous border that not only disrupts legitimate commerce and legal immigration, but also puts us at risk of increased criminal activity and possible acts of terrorism.

Visa policies also fail to welcome entrepreneurial immigrants who are eager to start new companies in the U.S. and force many would-be business founders to stay in jobs that constrain their ambitions for fear of losing the work visas they presently hold.

In short, the status quo is a mess, and failing to fix it will virtually guarantee limited economic progress, fewer jobs and gloomier prospects, not only for ourselves, but also for our children and grandchildren.

Immigration reform is not a political issue. It can be approached as one — as people at the extreme edges of both parties have proved — but doing so is a tragic error that ignores the basic problems and opportunities at stake. More than anything, immigration reform is an economic issue.

Failure to enact immigration reform will also leave in place a system that has completely failed to stem the tide of illegal immigration to the U.S., and that will mean millions more undocumented individuals entering the country in coming years.

The Senate was able to overcome its political differences and approve a comprehensive immigration reform package that addresses major issues, such as border security, bringing illegal immigrants back into the system and more realistic visa allocations. The U.S. House must make whatever effort is necessary to devise and pass its own constructive plan. Putting off the important task of immigration reform is no longer a viable option.