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Want More Small Business Success Stories? Support Immigration Reform.

By: Sankalp Trivedi – June 20, 2013

As the owner of a successful Indian restaurant business in New Jersey, I am a firm believer in the American Dream. I am living it.

I first came to New Jersey as a student in 2001. I earned a Masters Degree from Fairleigh Dickson College, obtained a green card, and became an entrepreneur. Now, my wife and I own two restaurants (one in Montclair and one in Secaucus), a New York City food truck and an event space in New Jersey, serving Indian cuisine to people from all walks of life, employing twenty people we trust and care about, and continuing to grow our business.

While I'm living this dream, at the same time I know how difficult it is for many New Jersey residents to pursue their dreams of running their own small business due to our outdated and broken immigration laws.

Like most restaurant owners, and especially ethnic specialty cuisine like ours, finding qualified people to work on our team is very difficult. Every time I put out an advertisement for work, it takes me months to hire. Only two out of ten applicants have the skill set to do the job. I then rarely find someone eligible to work with a visa. I abide by the law, and want to hire people legally and pay the taxes owed for my employees.

There's a solution to this problem: a path to citizenship that allows immigrants who aspire to be American citizens the opportunity to come out of the shadows, invest more deeply in their communities, and achieve the American Dream.

But, for small business owners like me, immigration reform is about more than labor supply. Immigrants are not just workers – they are also taxpayers and consumers. Immigration reform with a pathway to citizenship will boost the economy and increase consumer demand. Our major business comes from immigrant communities, and we're not alone: businesses of all different types across New Jersey are finding new Americans are a growing part of their customer base.

In fact, according to a new report from the Center for American Progress, the Senate immigration reform bill would boost New Jersey's Gross State Product by \$50 billion over ten years and create an average of 7,200 jobs annually in the Garden State. With one of the highest unemployment rates in the nation, we need that boost in job growth.

Among serious economists, immigration reform as an economy booster is not controversial. In fact, there's wide agreement across the political spectrum: the libertarian CATO Institute, the conservative American Action Forum, and the liberal

Center for American Progress all agree common sense, comprehensive immigration reform will be good for the economy.

I'm no economist, but I know small business. Small businesses need qualified employees, and right now we've got people who are already here and want to work but can't. We need customers with more money in their pockets. We need a stronger economy so we can continue to grow and create jobs. Immigration reform can deliver these things.

My story as an immigrant entrepreneur is part of a larger story of our nation's history. For generations, immigration has made our country stronger. We are a nation of immigrants.

I have been blessed with many opportunities, and in return I care about this country and I'm committed to building a successful business and creating jobs in my community. As we reform our immigration laws to meet the needs of a modern economy, I hope that we continue to live up to the best of our nation's ideals by rewarding aspiring Americans who want to work, start businesses, and contribute to our communities with the American promise of opportunity.

For the sake of the economy and our communities, I hope my representative, Congressman Frelinghuysen, and the entire New Jersey congressional delegation will support common sense immigration reform with a path to citizenship. That's the recipe for creating more small business success stories like mine.

Sankalp Trivedi and his wife Trusha are the owners of Mausam, an Indian restaurant, bar, and banquet service with locations in Montclair and Secaucus. He is a member of the New Jersey Main Street Alliance, and statewide network of local, independent small businesses.