

# The Seattle Times

## Grow the economy with immigration reform

By: Don Brunell and Mike Gempler – May 22, 2013

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A new bill to reform America's immigration laws was introduced in the U.S. Senate and was approved by the Judiciary Committee Tuesday. This will likely kick off several months of intense legislative activity on immigration.

Congress must succeed this time. It is time for comprehensive immigration reform, and perhaps no area of the country has a greater stake in this debate than Washington state.

Our economy and the health of our communities depend on trade, technology and agriculture. Washington needs workers of all skill levels, from highly educated specialists who work in our software and high-tech industries to those who work on our farms in the rural areas. Immigration is vital to providing Washington the workforce necessary to grow our economy.

That economic imperative, along with the need to deal with this issue in a realistic and compassionate manner, has led us to join with leaders in Washington's business, faith, agriculture and law-enforcement communities to sign the Washington Compact, at [www.washingtoncompact.com](http://www.washingtoncompact.com), a set of five principles intended to frame discussions about immigration reform in our state this year and hopefully create a model for the debate at the federal level.

The compact acknowledges how vital immigration is to growing a free-market economy, particularly here. Every study done, including those done by groups such as the Cato Institute and the Brookings Institution, confirms that immigrants expand economic vitality and growth.

As economies in many parts of the world stagnate due to an aging population, immigration holds the key to America's future expansion.

The compact recognizes that we must strengthen federal laws, both to protect our nation's borders and to create a fair path to legal status for those without documentation.

Border security must be part of a comprehensive solution. While there is no doubt that our borders are more secure than in the past, more remains to be done.

In addition, we recognize that to keep our communities safe, local law-enforcement resources should focus on criminal activities, not civil violations of federal code.

We also acknowledge that strong families are the foundation of successful and cohesive communities. We oppose policies that unnecessarily separate families.

Finally, we state clearly that hundreds of thousands of immigrants are integrated into communities across Washington state today. They work, attend church and are active in their communities. Their kids are in classrooms every day. Immigrants are part of the

fabric of Washington right now. We must adopt a humane approach to this reality, reflecting our unique culture, history and spirit of inclusion.

An impressive cross section of leaders and groups has already signed on to the Washington Compact, including the Association of Washington Business, the Seattle Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce, the Washington Growers League and 14 other groups representing agriculture, churches and faith groups.

Reflecting the bipartisan spirit of the compact, Republican leaders, including former Secretary of State Sam Reed and former U.S. Rep. Sid Morrison are signers. They join Dale Foreman and Chris Vance, both former state legislators and former chairmen of the Washington State Republicans.

Washington's congressional delegation, which includes influential leaders in both houses and both parties, can and should play a key role in finally passing comprehensive immigration reform, because in this Washington, immigration is a local issue.

The debate has begun in earnest in the nation's capital. This time let's pass immigration reform.

*Don Brunell, left, is president of the Association of Washington Business. Mike Gempler is executive director of the Washington Growers League.*