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*Brianna McClane/MEDILL*

*Former Illinois Gov. Jim Edgar supports the Illinois Business Immigration Coalition, a group of more than 200 businesses pushing for immigration reform. Executive Director Dave Bender of the Illinois Green Industry is co-chair of the coalition.*

### Illinois businesses push for immigration reform to boost economy

by **BRIANNA MCCLANE**  
**April 09, 2010**

The pursuit of life, liberty and a steady paycheck is what brings immigrants to this country -- 12 million of those are here illegally.

To deal with that problem, more than 200 Illinois businesses are forming the first business organization to support comprehensive immigration reform as a step toward a better economy and fulfillment of the American Dream.

"This is America, this is a nation that was built on immigrants," former Illinois Gov. Jim Edgar said Thursday at the launch of the Illinois Business Immigration Coalition. "If we had had the current immigration policy in place for the last 200 years, most of us, including me, would not be here."

The coalition says the U.S. would generate \$1.5 trillion through immigration reform, such as providing a path to citizenship, while mass deportation would cost \$2.6 trillion. Illinois would spend \$11.4 billion deporting the undocumented workers who make up 5 percent of the metropolitan Chicago workforce.

"Never in the history of the world, no matter how ruthless the dictator has been, have you moved 12 million people out of one country into another," Edgar said, "and I don't think America wants to have that distinction."

A second-generation immigrant in the crowd Thursday illustrates Edgar's point.

Rodolfo Alvarez immigrated from Mexico 40 years ago, 20 years after his father came to America. A member of the Pilsen "Together" Chamber of Commerce, Alvarez believes immigration reform will generate revenue because of taxes and citizenship application fees.

"Believe me that everybody's going to be willing to pay whatever amount of money to become legal," he said.

As for Americans who worry about immigrant competition in a time of job shortages, immigrants take jobs most Americans don't want, Edgar said, but immigrants won't stay in these entry-level positions as they search for the American dream.

"This issue will help stimulate the economy," Edgar said. "They will create businesses and create jobs for other people. They'll spend

money, and that's really what we got to get going: We've got to start spending money, we've got to create jobs."

The coalition is on the right track to economic improvement, said Dan Griswold, director of the Center for Trade Policy Studies at the Cato Institute, a non-partisan libertarian think tank in Washington, D.C. He said immigrants take entry-level positions that complement, not compete, with native-born Americans. This allows Americans to take higher positions.

"We are coming out of a steep recession, but immigrants don't tend to come when there aren't jobs," he said. "They come when there are jobs available."



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