

DesMoinesRegister.com

Lift economy by retooling immigration, experts urge

By REID FORGRAVE • rforgrave@dmreg.com • June 18, 2010

There's a missing piece in America's immigration laws.

That was the message two leading thinkers on immigration brought to Des Moines on Thursday at a handful of events sponsored by the Iowa Immigration Education Coalition.

Educated immigrants can get visas through employers. Immigrants married to American citizens, or with relatives who are American citizens, have pathways to citizenship. But for low-skilled immigrant workers — who make up the vast majority of America's 11 million undocumented immigrants — virtually the only path to America is illegal, they said.

Conservative thinker Daniel Griswold, of the libertarian Cato Institute, and liberal thinker Raul Hinojosa-Ojeda, an assistant professor of Chicano studies at UCLA, appeared around Des Moines on Thursday at a luncheon for the Rotary Club of Des Moines, on the Jan Mickelson Show and at a public forum at a church near Drake University.

They have different backgrounds, but they had come to the same controversial conclusion: Comprehensive immigration reform would be a boon to the U.S. economy.

"Immigrants today are allowing our population to continue to grow at a slower but steady rate," Griswold told a crowd of 200 Rotarians at the Wakonda Club. "I know that's an issue today in Iowa. You rank 43rd in population growth. Close to three-quarters of your counties have lost population since 2000. I think immigration is part of keeping Iowa's population on a growth path."

The two shared some statistics related to immigration: It takes nearly 10 years for most immigrants to become U.S. citizens; the U.S. Department of Labor says the country will add 2 million to 3 million low-skilled jobs in the next 10 years as the pool of Americans willing to do these jobs continues to shrink; the country has five times as many border patrol agents on the southwestern border as it did 15 years ago.

"And yet we're still wrestling with this problem," Griswold said. "We need to expand legal channels for peaceful, hard-working people to enter the country legally to do these jobs that an insufficient number of Americans will fill. ... And that transforms border security. You'll have our agents and police officers going after terrorists and other real criminals, rather than going after the dishwashers, or the people who want to hang drywall, or who want to work at the meat-processing plant."

The two also shared some conclusions of their studies on immigration.

In separate studies, Griswold and Hinojosa-Ojeda came to the conclusion that comprehensive immigration reform would increase the U.S. gross domestic product by \$1.5 trillion over 10 years. But if the country adopted nationwide immigration laws similar to Arizona's, the gross domestic product would decrease by \$2.6 trillion over 10 years.

Hinojosa-Ojeda said he hoped the "Iowa common-sense point of view" would prevail on the country's stalled, politically charged immigration debate.

"We have a broken immigration system, and it obviously doesn't make sense," Hinojosa-Ojeda said. "The fact that there's going to be immigration is inevitable. ... One way or another, immigration is going to come in, and it's going to contribute to the economy. The question is, are we going to have it as a legal process? Or are we going to have it like we have had it the past 20 years — as a process that's in the shadows?"

Advertisement

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™