

September 18, 2013

The Honorable Diane Black
1531 Longworth HOB
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Marsha Blackburn
217 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Steve Cohen
2404 Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jim Cooper
1536 Longworth HOB
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Scott Desjarlais
413 Cannon HOB
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John J. Duncan, Jr.
2207 Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Stephen Fincher
1118 Longworth HOB
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chuck Fleischmann
230 Cannon HOB
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Phil Roe
407 Cannon House Office Bldg
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Tennessee Delegation:

As leaders of Tennessee's colleges and universities, we are writing to encourage you to address a critical threat to America's preeminence as the center of innovation and prosperity: our inability under current United States immigration policy to help Tennessee retain and capitalize on many of the talented individuals we are educating on our campuses.

Foreign-born students help create jobs for Tennessee and often provide the technological innovations that help drive economic growth. Many will serve as the next generation of entrepreneurs, scientists, and leaders in our state.

A recent study by the Partnership for a New American Economy and the American Enterprise Institute found that for every 100 foreign-born graduates from a U.S. Master's or PhD program who stay in America working in a STEM field, 262 additional jobs are created for American workers.

In Tennessee, that can translate into a significant new growth -- since our share of foreign-born advanced STEM degree holders working in STEM fields grew by 85 percent between 2000 and 2010.

Yet, in 2009, 37 percent of the students earning Master's or PhDs in STEM fields from Tennessee's research universities were temporary residents, a group with no clear path to stay in America after graduation. And more than half of all students earning engineering

PhDs in recent years have been non-citizens. We need reform to keep these graduates.

Studies also show immigrants are twice as likely to start new companies to support our communities and to create new jobs. Immigrant-owned businesses in Tennessee already generate about \$851 million in income for the state each year.

But many of our future students came to this country as children and have been unable to take advantage of an American education and contribute to our economy because of their status. A recent study found that incentivizing these children to pursue a college education by passing the DREAM Act would add 1.4 million jobs and generate \$329 billion in economic activity over the next 20 years.

Our educational institutions succeed when all of Tennessee's industries succeed, and research shows that passing immigration reform will benefit all sectors of the state's economy – especially our agricultural and housing sectors.

But our current immigration system creates real obstacles to growth. Low limits on high-skilled visas leave immigrants with no way to stay after earning a diploma, or they face untenable delays waiting for a permanent visa. At the same time, low limits on low-skilled visas leave farmers struggling to find the workers they need to produce and grow.

Meanwhile, too many people are living in the shadows unable to join our workforce, gain an education, and contribute to the economy they live in, while we face real worker shortages and slow economic growth.

Creating a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants will have a positive effect for Tennessee's economy. According to a study by Regional Economic Models, Inc., for every person who enrolls, an estimated \$6,916 will be added to our Gross State Product by 2020.

Tennesseans know we should not wait to fix our immigration system. Recent polls show that 63 percent of Tennessee voters support the Senate's comprehensive immigration reform bill, with 91 percent believing it is important we fix our immigration system this year.

We call on you to work together to develop a comprehensive, bipartisan solution on immigration reform. From education to agriculture -- to housing to business – Tennessee's economy needs your support on this important issue at this critical time.

Thank you for your consideration and for your continued leadership.

Sincerely,

Robert C. Fisher
President
Belmont University

John Smarrelli, Jr.
President
Christian Brothers University

Harvill C. Eaton
President
Cumberland University

Gregory D. Jordan
President
King College

B. James Dawson
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Kenneth L. Schwab
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Gordon Bietz
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Nancy B. Moody
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Gary E. Weedman
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Randy Lowry
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Bill Greer
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