

September 13, 2013

Dear Members of the Florida Delegation:

As leaders of Florida's universities and colleges, educating the next generation of entrepreneurs, scientists, and global pioneers, we call on 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 retain and capitalize on the talented individuals we are training in our universities and colleges.

Fixing our immigration system will be critical to scientific growth at Florida's universities and economic growth in our state. In 2009, 53 percent of the students earning Master's or PhDs in STEM fields from Florida's research-intensive universities were temporary residents, a group with no clear path to stay in America after graduation. More than 60 percent of our students earning engineering PhDs in recent years were also non-citizens.

Foreign-born students create jobs for Florida and often provide the technological innovations that drive economic growth in the 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 of a US Master's or PhD program who stay in America working in a STEM field, 262 jobs are created for American workers. But in Florida our share of foreign-born STEM advanced degree holders working in STEM fields decreased by 17 percent between 2000 and 2010.

Our students often go on to start companies, which support communities and create jobs. Immigrants are more than twice as likely to start a business and immigrant-owned businesses in Florida generate about \$13.3 billion in income for the state each year.

Our educational institutions thrive when all of Florida's industries thrive and research shows that passing immigration reform will benefit all sectors of the state's economy. Our \$7.8 billion agriculture sector needs workers in order to grow and expand. Immigration reform would mean more jobs for U.S. citizens and immigrants and greater production capacities for our farmers. In the housing sector, immigrants increased home values in Florida between 2000 and 2010 – by \$11,672 for the median home in Miami-Dade County.

Many of our future bright 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 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. In fact, creating a pathway to citizenship for all undocumented immigrants will have a positive effect for Florida's economy. According to a study by Regional Economic Models, Inc., for every person who enrolls, an estimated \$4,380 will be added to our Gross State Product by 2020.

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 for a permanent visa. 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. For example, according to the nonpartisan advocacy group Change the Equation, from 2009 to 2011 1.4 STEM jobs were posted online in Florida for every one unemployed STEM worker in the state.

Florida cannot afford to wait to fix our immigration system. We ask you to work together to develop a comprehensive, bipartisan solution because all parts of our economy – from education to agriculture to housing to business – need it. Recent polls show that 72 percent of Florida voters support the Senate’s comprehensive immigration reform bill, while 86 percent believe it is important we fix our immigration system this year. Now is the time for Washington leaders to act and ensure that the US can continue to compete on the global stage.

Sincerely,

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