



Foreign Work Force Helps Sustain Our Local Businesses

Articles

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With Labor Day now behind us, likely many of us have enjoyed some summer fun with our families. Whether a lazy summer day on one of our Jersey Shore beaches, or a day riding the coasters at one of our Pennsylvania amusement parks, summer affords us this time to shut it down and soak up the sun. But, while you're walking the boards looking for ice cream, have you ever stopped to notice who are those folks working the rides, serving the ice cream or manning the gaming booths? Same goes for the ticket takers at the theme parks. And who hasn't used their mobile phone or laptop to order those staples for the shore house that you just don't want to leave the beach to go shop for. Take a closer look and also ponder who might have designed that great app you are using to order those school supplies while the kids are splashing in the pool. Now that you think about it, walking the boardwalks at night can often be analogous to walking down Fifth Avenue in Manhattan during the holidays, English is among the languages you will hear.

The Jersey Shore and Pennsylvania amusement and entertainment industries are great examples of industries that are reliant upon a foreign work force to thrive. Whether through the use of foreign student workers coming to the United States to get a taste of our culture, or the seasonal worker visa program, these industries utilize an immigrant workforce to staff their businesses. And what about that app that you are using on your now sandy cellphone to order from. Ever stop to wonder where that is being developed. You might be surprised to know that a few of our country's largest American brand retailers are reliant upon a largely foreign national specialized labor force, based here in the United States, to develop these mobile shopping technologies that we can no longer live without.

Pick up a recent newspaper, click a link, or turn on the news and you are likely to hear about the need for a massive wall, travel bans, "extreme" vetting protocols, or the need to hire an additional 15,000 ICE agents all to ensure that we are securing the border and making border security and the slow of illegal immigration-stated priorities. The current administration rode that wave into the White House. Quieter, but equally impactful, has been the implementation of proposals by the current administration that has put legal immigration under attack

as well. This issue is of significant concern to local industries who are dependent upon their foreign talent to meet their business needs and keep the rides rolling.

So how is legal immigration under attack? Let's review the issue from the United States employer side.

US Employers

As a country we continue to have a shortage of one of our most highly utilized visas for specialty workers, the H-1B. These are the visas used by our retailers for their software technology development workers. For at least the past few years now, significantly more than 100,000 people had applied for the only 65,000 available H-1B visas issued each year. This has created an actual visa "lottery" where your chances of having your visa even considered for approval is about 50 percent. The fix, we need more H-1B visas.

For the seasonal worker visas—the H-2B—this past spring in March, the cap for summer visas was reached even before the effective date of April 1. This caused a panic for workers that ultimately required USCIS to issue another emergency distribution of 15,000 H-2B visas in July to those employers who could prove irreparable harm to their business if they could not get workers. Even despite the industries who are dependent on the H-2B workers trying to admirably offer veteran preferences for the open jobs, these employers still cannot find workers willing to do the work. The fix, we need more H-2B visas.

Additionally, as global employers continue to file for visa applications or extensions for existing management-level workers in their global operations to join their U.S. operations, the headwinds of the current immigration climate have resulted in increased scrutiny and denial rates in these applications thereby impeding the efficiencies of their operations here.

On the heels of these, the President Donald Trump, in early August, put his support behind proposed legislation known as the Reforming American Immigration For A Strong Economy (RAISE) Act. If passed, this legislation would replace the current and working employment-based immigrant visa system with a skills-based points system. The over-arching goal of this legislation is analogous to the wall, keep more people out by curbing the existing immigration system. There are also proposals out there calling for a complete overhaul of the H-1B program where there are already visa shortages.

While the ultimate fate of the so-called "travel bans" are tied up in the Supreme Court until likely October, these bans have added to the overall arguably negative current business climate for immigration. Contrasting this climate is the general consensus of American business that as a country we not only need, but in some measure are dependent upon, the foreign talent that chooses to work here and join in the efforts of our existing American team of workers, for the good of the country.

As summer draws to a close, if you're heading down the Shore for one last time this month, perhaps observe some of those workers around you. While not native born, they are here contributing to our local businesses who are reliant upon them. We need to preserve—albeit modify—an immigration system that both protects our borders but also can additionally aid our legal immigration system also under attack. •



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