



STATE OF WASHINGTON

April 29, 2013

The Honorable Patty Murray
United States Senator
154 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Maria Cantwell
United States Senator
311 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Murray and Cantwell:

As leaders in Washington State, we want to underscore our unwavering commitment to the core principles of broader immigration reform, including a path to citizenship for the children of undocumented immigrants, and the opportunity for all undocumented immigrants to become citizens through a fair and orderly process that recognizes their dignity as human beings. Comprehensive immigration reform legislation has been introduced in the United States Senate, and we strongly urge you to support passage of legislation this year.

Within that broad immigration framework, there will be an opportunity for you to take concrete steps to bolster our state's economy through urgently needed reforms of our high-skilled immigration programs. We urge you to support the inclusion of the important reforms contained in the Immigration Innovation Act of 2013 (S. 169), in broader immigration reform. Those reforms would address the immediate, short-term need to provide American and Washington State employers with greater access to engineers, computer scientists and researchers, while also addressing the long-term need to invest in America's science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) education pipeline, by dedicating significant new resources to that purpose. We are counting on your support to ensure that the critical reform elements embodied in the Immigration Innovation Act are incorporated into broader immigration reform efforts.

The potential economic value of these reforms for our state was clearly illustrated by a recent study conducted by the Washington Roundtable and Boston Consulting Group. The study concluded that Washington State currently has 25,000 unfilled jobs, primarily in the technology and health-care sectors which are vacant because there is not yet enough home-grown STEM talent to fill them. This number is expected to increase to 50,000 by 2017.

To keep our state in the forefront of innovation and job growth, it is essential that we find ways to fill those positions. On a broader scale, America's competitive future rests in aggressively addressing the gap that currently exists between the skills employers need and the skills possessed by potential employees. The reforms in the Immigration Innovation Act will help to address this gap by establishing a new "Promoting American Ingenuity Account" - channeling new funds to states to strengthen STEM education; expand the number of well-trained and effective STEM teachers; and increase the number of graduates in STEM related programs. These funds will serve to complement and support new state initiatives to improve STEM education and address Washington's unacceptable skills gap. According to a statewide survey of 600 Washington voters in January of this year - 83% of Washington citizens agree that increasing focus on STEM education will improve Washington's economy. These reforms will strengthen American competitiveness and lay the groundwork for our future prosperity by emphasizing increases in STEM education opportunities.

Historically, communities across the United States are melting pots of multiple cultures and nationalities based on our nation's history of welcoming immigrants. Ultimately, all of us are immigrants or the descendants of immigrants. When admitted through a well-regulated system, immigrants strengthen the United States by creating economic opportunities, increasing America's scientific and cultural resources, strengthening our ties with other nations, fulfilling humanitarian commitments, and supporting family ties and values that are necessary to build strong communities.

Our current system has failed, leading to approximately 500,000 people continuing to enter the United States without documentation each year, while many other undocumented workers are in the work force as a result of entering legally but overstaying their student, tourist, or employment visas.

Approximately 268,000 workers, equal to about half of the undocumented seasonal workers in the United States, used the current temporary, unskilled worker programs (the H2-A and H2-B visas) in 2011, but the current immigration system inadequately addresses the growing numbers of individuals wishing entrance to the United States through a temporary work visa program or as legal permanent residents.

We know that roughly two-thirds of undocumented adult immigrants have lived in the United States for ten years or more, one million unauthorized immigrants are children, and another 4.5 million U.S.-citizen children have at least one undocumented parent. These families are forced to live "underground," unable to get drivers' licenses or car insurance in most states, unlikely to obtain health insurance, and afraid to report crimes to local law enforcement. Since undocumented immigrants are barred from most federal public assistance, the burden of providing social services, education, and health care falls to the state and local governments, who are increasingly feeling the financial impact of growing numbers of immigrants living in their communities.

The only way to solve these problems is for the federal government to finally adopt comprehensive immigration reform this year which provides an efficient means for foreign nationals to obtain legal authorization for temporary visas or legal permanent residency. A special focus on the need for highly-skilled workers must be an important part of this effort.

We stand ready to work with you on this important issue to the future of our state and our nation.
Thank you

Sincerely,

Jay Inslee
Governor

Frank Chopp
Speaker of House

Ed Murray
Senate Democrat Leader

Rodney Tom
Senate Majority Coalition Caucus Leader

Mark Schoesler
Senate Republican Leader