

**Senator Padilla Opening Statement: “Unlocking America’s Potential: How Immigration Fuels Economic Growth and Our Competitive Advantage”**  
**Senate Committee on the Budget**  
September 13, 2023

Thank you Chairman Whitehouse and Ranking Member Grassley for inviting me to be here to co-chair this hearing on the role that immigration plays in driving economic growth and ensuring that our nation stays competitive on the global stage.

I’m glad to be here today to learn more about the economic challenges caused by our outdated and broken immigration system, and the steps we might take to make our system — and our country — stronger moving forward.

Even in 2023, it’s no exaggeration to say that America remains a shining “city upon a hill” to countless people around the world who dream of a better life.

But make no mistake: it isn’t just immigrants who rely on *America* for a better future, it’s *America* that relies on immigrants.

Our nation’s storybook is written *by immigrants*.

Our cultural fabric is more vibrant *because of immigrants*.

And our economic success will continue to *depend on immigrants* and all that they contribute to our nation.

Yet, for all that they provide, Congress has failed to pass significant immigration legislation to update our outdated immigration system in over three decades.

As the senator from the state with the most immigrants, and the proud son of immigrants from Mexico, I know personally the benefits that immigrants bring to our country.

And as chair of the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration, I’ve now chaired six hearings examining the vital roles that immigrants play in our communities — from members of the military, to essential workers on the frontlines of the pandemic, to entrepreneurs.

But over the course of those hearings, too many times I've heard the devastating impacts our outdated laws and growing visa backlogs have on families, students, and workers attempting to immigrate to the United States.

This includes U.S. citizen family members who are separated or kept apart from loved ones because of our outdated immigration system.

Here's what I've learned:

Every day that we fail to reform our immigration system is another day we hold back our economy — and another day our economic competitors rise.

According to Forward-dot-U-S, meaningful immigration reform could bring 3.2 million new jobs to the U.S. over the next decade, and add one trillion dollars to our economy.

As we'll hear today, part of that reform means facilitating immigration of health care providers like physicians and nurses.

Today, the United States is facing dire health care workforce shortages, including a projected shortage of up to 124,000 physicians by 2034.

But luckily, we know that immigrant health care workers can help fill this gap — in large part because they already are.

Immigrants write our prescriptions, they care for us at our bedsides, and they're often the cornerstone for rural and low-income communities.

Yet backlogs in processing green cards along with annual caps to employment-based visas mean we can't meet the high demand for health care workers in the United States.

We can't meet it, that is, unless we act.

Strengthening our economy also means helping the immigrants who hope to make a career for themselves here in the STEM fields, filling a desperately needed gap in our workforce.

It means helping potential entrepreneurs and business owners, who whether because of restrictive student or employment-based visas, are forced to leave the country, or never get a chance to contribute to our economy.

And it means passing a pathway to citizenship for long term undocumented individuals like Dreamers and DACA recipients — hundreds of thousands of young people who are already home in America, but who can't pursue the same opportunities as their peers who have citizenship.

How can we live up to our full economic potential when all these people are denied a secure place in America?

But I want to make clear: the need for immigrants in our economy stretches far beyond the health care or STEM fields, and into every essential industry — from agriculture to education, construction to food processing.

In fact, during the COVID-19 pandemic, nearly one in five jobs deemed essential by the U.S. government was held by an immigrant.

Yet these same workers deemed essential to keeping our country running are denied any permanent protections, left to live in limbo.

That's not just a moral failure — it's a national economic weakness, too.

And yet, it's indicative of a larger problem that we'll square off with today: we have the solutions to grow our economy and compete on the world stage.

Time and again, the solutions are there — but politics blind Congress from taking action.

Too often we hear from the other side of the aisle that they are unwilling to move forward on bipartisan immigration proposals that would benefit our communities and our economy because of the southern border.

We should be able to walk and chew gum at the same time.

We can have constructive conversations about the border while also trying to improve legal pathways to immigration that we desperately need to strengthen our economy and keep us on track to remaining the strongest economy in the world.

To fail to act would not just cause the United States to fall behind here at home, we would be losing our competitive edge globally, as well.

I believe Americans have had enough of Republican fearmongering and legislative roadblocks on immigration.

We must come to the table and work to bring justice and dignity back to the immigration system, provide stability for immigrants living in America, and invest in the future of our economy.

Now, after thirty years of inaction, that may seem like a lot.

But I challenge all of my colleagues here today to listen to the testimony of our witnesses, look past the talking points and partisan rifts, and get to work.

Thank you.

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