

## The re-awakening of the American dream



The Illinois Business Immigration Coalition (IBIC) is a group dedicated to common-sense immigration reform as a means to rebuild the economy and provide companies with the talent they need . . .

**A**t the invitation of Caterpillar Chairman and CEO Doug Oberhelman, and John Rowe, Chairman Emeritus of Exelon, the IMA was invited to participate in the launch of the Illinois Business Immigration Coalition (IBIC) — a group dedicated to common-sense immigration reform. The business-backed group hopes to avoid some of the political pitfalls of the past and instead focus on the immigration issue as a means to rebuild the economy and provide companies with the talent they need while promoting the integration of immigrant-consumers/taxpayers into our economy. The Illinois Manufacturers' Association is supporting this organization because it is introducing a reality-based checklist into the immigration debate. Below are just a few of the cogent points being made:

- **We need high-skilled immigration:** The U.S. is facing a critical shortage of science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) workers. By 2018, there will be more than 220,000 advanced-degree STEM jobs that will not be filled, even if every single American STEM graduate finds a job.
- **We need low-skilled immigration:** Currently, 75 percent of agricultural workers hired in the United States are foreign born. And, according to the USDA Economic Research Service, a decrease in available immigrant labor could reduce U.S. agricultural output and exports over the long haul, even as the demand for food is growing.
- **We need immigrant entrepreneurs:** Illinois's 56,567 Latino-owned businesses had sales and receipts of \$10.3 billion and employed 77,449 people in 2007, the last year for which data is available. The state's 59,367 Asian-owned businesses had sales and receipts of \$18.5 billion and employed 102,991 people, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2007 Survey of Business Owners. Immigrants are nearly twice as likely as U.S.-born entrepreneurs to start new businesses according to analysis of entrepreneurial activities between 1996 and 2008.
- **We need to make sure international and undocumented students trained by American universities are able to create jobs here at home:** Nearly 90 percent of patents from the University of Illinois have at least one immigrant inventor. Providing incentives for undocumented students to pursue college and allowing them to work here legally will add 1.4 million jobs and generate \$329 billion in economic activity over the next 20 years.
- **We need immigrant consumers and taxpayers:** In the Chicago metro area alone, the consumer expenditures of unauthorized immigrants generated more than 31,000 jobs in the local economy and added \$5.5 billion annually to the gross regional product, according to a 2002 survey by the University of Illinois at Chicago. Unauthorized immigrants in Illinois paid \$499.2 million in state and local taxes in 2010, according to data from the Institute for Taxation and Economic Policy, which includes \$85.4 million in state income taxes, \$45.8 million in property taxes and \$368 million in sales taxes.
- **We need immigrants to sustain American manufacturing:** A 2011 survey conducted by Deloitte and the NAM's Manufacturing Institute found that even with unemployment hovering close to nine percent, U.S. manufacturing companies could not fill 600,000 open positions for skilled workers. More than half the executives who participated in the survey expected the shortage to grow over the next three to five years.

The IBIC hopes to recruit over 1,000 businesses and 300 CEO's from all economic sectors of the Illinois economy to sign up in support of this effort. And then, we need to contact our federal legislators and urge them to support common-sense reform. If you support the effort, please go to [www.illinoisbic.biz](http://www.illinoisbic.biz) and sign up to help this effort.

Immigration is certainly a hot button political topic. However, a growing economy, one that can compete with any nation in the world, needs vibrancy and talent to meet the challenges of the upcoming decades. Allowance for new citizens from all over the world is something we should embrace, not fear. Immigrants have always been a key element of the American dream. I urge you to join this effort to help your business, your state and your country. ■