

EXPLORING IMMIGRATION

MODULE 6

SPEAKER It's a beautiful day to become a citizen. 00:00:13

[APPLAUSE 00:00:14]

NARRATOR The immigration conundrum facing the United States in the early 21st century can be traced back to passage of the 1965 Family Reunification Law. 00:00:50

A reform of this law by the U.S. Congress that satisfies most Americans has failed to happen due to the influence of special interest groups. 00:01:01

MAN #1 There is an odd coalition of groups that don't agree on much except that they want to block any legislative change on immigration. And it consists of some employer groups, by no means all, but some groups of employers, some non-governmental organizations that are oriented towards particular ethnic groups or towards particular human rights or refugee issues, and some ideological groups; both on the left and on the right. 00:01:32

These are not necessarily conservative or liberal political perspectives. There is a kind of circle – a circularity of belief on these things in which the political extremes in the United States, right and left, often agree on these issues. 00:01:50

I hope over time that the political forces that formed the coalition to block some of the important recommendations of the Commission will come to see that it represented this kind of humane, balanced, sensible approach to immigration policy that is in the national interest, not only in the interest of the groups they represent and will

decide that it's time to step back and support these kinds of sensible reforms. 00:02:20

MAN #2 There's a real need for immigration reform and that reform means solving the problem of unauthorized migration, but also improving the really cumbersome and inadequate system for legal migration. I for one am not sure that that necessarily always means more numbers. 00:02:38

But it does mean doing things right. It's hard to know if we're going to be able to solve it. Unfortunately, the debate has become so polarized about what to do about currently illegally resident individuals that it's hard for either side to give it up, to make the concessions that are necessary to resolve the problem. 00:02:59

And resolving *that* problem has been backlogging reform of the legal system. The debate inside the Beltway is very convoluted now. Do you – you know what tactic or strategy do you pursue? Do you do comprehensive reform? Do you do targeted reform? How do you phrase earned amnesty versus becoming regular, you know? 00:03:26

There's a lot of terminology now about how do you regularize this population or not. 00:03:31

NARRATOR The primary focus of this ongoing reform debate for the past three decades is on the numbers of immigrants to be allowed into the country each year and how economics and jobs are impacted by these newcomers. 00:03:45

MAN #3 The 1965 legislation had embedded within it certain seeds if you will that – that grew and - and took over, such that we no longer control the numbers; people coming in, who, from where, what types of workers, employers, what types of - of skills. And this goes on for 40 some years. 00:04:05

We're not deliberating. We're not debating. We're not having a national conversation about our immigration. So it comes as no surprise that over 40 years later when there is a large comprehensive discussion and piece of legislation, it's hotly debated and very divisive. 00:04:22

That fact was set in play 40 years ago. It's about time we have that kind of national debate. 00:04:31

MAN #4 The philosophical base for the United States immigration system is based on family reunification, meaning that the priorities are – are – are given to families trying to bring other members of their family into the United States. That is where most of the numbers go. 00:04:46

The Chamber doesn't take a position on family-based visas. Our position is you know well that's for other groups to argue. What we think is you can have two parallel universes in which you have a system for family reunification as that's a priority of our government which has been and of our society in general, and a system that addresses the needs of employers. 00:05:07

We are not going to be catches as some people have tried to do in a - in a war with – with other groups – is to well here the pie you guys fight over it. We do know and believe that the pie can grow and we can all have the needs met of the families. 00:05:24

It is important you know from our studies and our research that related to the families and the expansion of – of the – the type of immigrants in their countries of origin that a lot of the backlash against immigrants is not really employment based, it's not really illegals, it has to do a lot with culture. 00:05:44

NARRATOR Farmers in western Michigan are worried that reform might mean the end of their access to needed migrant workers and the end of family farming. But out in Silicon Valley there is little interest in such

agricultural issues. The need there it is claimed is more high tech workers to staff the booming business of information technology.
00:06:10

MAN #5 What our primary business is growing fruit; apples, cherries, peaches, plums, pears. We grow basically all the tree fruits. We are dependent on a migrant work force. Basically all of our fruit, with the exception of tart cherries, is hand harvested. 00:06:28

Today's market demands a very high quality fruit. Everything you see in the grocery store is very pretty, free of bruises and things like that, and that requires a lot of hand labor. 00:06:39

In the case of apples, we grow around 60,000 bushels of apples and every one of those bushels is hand harvested. So it takes a - a lot of hands to harvest that many apples. 00:06:48

I think without at least a – a migrant – migrant or immigrant work force we would certainly not be growing the amount of acres that we are today. We would be probably basically a – a farm market and not much beyond that. 00:07:04

And the unfortunate part about that is, is it doesn't lend itself to helping the local economy, commerce and – and all the things that we need in – in this state right now. 00:07:16

MAN #6 The broader immigration policy program here in the U.S. is not one that we're largely involved with because we think that there are others who are better capable of dealing with that than we are.
00:07:26

We have focused on the H1B visa issue because there is a pool of talent that comes through that process that is very important to the industry and is necessary to help continue to move the technology forward; but along with that create the jobs for all of those other folks that are looking for employment that would not be employed if

we didn't have the technology and the products that are a consequence of these folks that we're hiring that happen to have an H1B visa and the technology expertise that is needed by the industry. 00:08:01

MAN #7 Semi-conductors are the most complex product made by man. We are getting billions of transistors or circuits on little bits of silicon about the size of your thumb nail. And to do that takes a lot of ingenuity, a lot of innovation. It takes a lot of the – the best basically of – that science and technology has to offer. 00:08:23

And in order for our industry to continue to make these products and advance technology into the future, we need access to the Ph.D.'s that are graduating out of universities around the world, but particularly here in the United States. 00:08:37

If you look at the university graduates in the Ph.D. programs here, there are – about 2/3 of them are foreign born. So when they're graduating and we're trying to recruit these students to help us make the products for tomorrow, we have a problem; because they need to have visas in order to stay in this country. 00:08:57

There is a cap on the visa – number of visas that are offered. And so many of these people are forced to leave the country and either work for our competitors or we can hire them and put them in our overseas facilities. 00:09:11

NARRATOR Business generally wants more workers and not dependent family members who are without the skills needed to improve the bottom line of America's corporations; especially those needed in the information technology industry. 00:09:26

MAN #8 The question is, how fast does the United States want to continue to grow and how competitive does it want to remain in – in coming years, vis-a-vie other countries. And without immigration, the formulas that we've seen and the economic implications are, without

immigration, economically we're going to diminish without the help of these workers. 00:09:48

When we talk about high skilled workers, you know most engineering and science degrees, especially when you get to the Masters and Doctors, are going to foreigners; even in the United States. Therefore, they want to be able to hire those guys because if not, those individuals are going to go to other countries and compete against us. And for us to remain competitive, we need to be able to hire them. 00:10:09

So it is – it is very different the needs of all the businesses and we're trying to have a - an immigration policy to address all of their needs. 00:10:17

FEMALE #1 When we here at the National Association of Manufacturers, we hear from our members all of the time that the number one impediment to continued growth is their ability to find and keep skilled workers. 00:10:28

And so without the ability to either move American workers very quickly into those jobs, without *that* ability, without our ability to – to tap in – into foreign nationals who want to come to this country or are already here and want to stay in this country, that we really do shoot ourselves in the foot; and in fact we drive our competition overseas. 00:10:54

NARRATOR Outside the business groups that lobby Congress for higher numbers are individual critics who claim these groups are not presenting an accurate picture of the high-tech job market. 00:11:05

MAN #9 The industry claims that the sky is going to fall in and their whole industry will collapse without H1B's, and that's just absurd. After all, it was the American worker that built this industry in the first place. The industry is only using a small fraction of the qualified people as it is, so the – the claim is absurd on the face of it. 00:11:26

Actually the industry would be better off if they did a better job of hiring. They would get better people. I don't mean to say that all the Americans are better than all the H1B's. I just mean if they hired on the basis of talent instead of skill sets, they would get better people, they'd finish their projects earlier, they would meet their deadlines more often, they would have fewer bugs in their code. 00:11:48

NARRATOR But the debate inside the Beltway in Washington has been generally one sided, as reflected by the view of economist Steven Moore. 00:11:56

MAN #10 I've always said that one of the hidden advantages of immigration is they are America's economic and demographic safety valve. And what I mean by that is everyone knows that starting in about 5 to 10 years, the 80 million baby boomers, I'm a baby boomer, are going to start retiring. 00:12:17

And the question – the big question of America is, how do we continue to flourish as a first-rate economic power when we have so many people moving out of the work force into retirement? Who is going to provide the economic support system so that they can get the benefits that they've been promised in retirement? 00:12:35

I believe immigration is key. I think that we need immigration today and over the next 20 years more than we've ever needed them, because they're a way of smoothing out this demographic problem that we have. And this also is another advantage we have over Europe and Japan. Those countries are graying, there's no question about it. 00:12:54

They've had even lower birth rates than we do. Fortunately, we're at about replacement level fertility, so we're – our population is going to roughly stabilize over the next 50 years. A lot of those countries in Europe and Japan, they're actually going to see falling populations. They're going to have about 1.5 workers for every 1 person whose

retired. Well you can't run an economy with that kind of dependency ratio. 00:13:19

Immigration will help us steer ourselves out of that crisis. And the truth is for people like you and me, who's going to pay for our retirement? Partly it's going to be immigrants who are going to come here and do the work over the next 20 or 30 years; and God bless them for coming. 00:13:34

NARRATOR Opponents of immigration growth keep the focus on how higher numbers negatively impact native-born workers and the overall economy. 00:13:43

MAN #11 Our current policy has created a group of winners and group of losers. The losers are the ones who compete with immigrant workers. By having more workers of their type in the economy, the more pressures for the jobs. Their wage goes down. The winners are the people who hire those immigrants and the people who use our human services. 00:14:04

Which if you look at Southern California for example, to a large extent happen to be the upper middle class, they are the ones who hire the immigrant nannies. They are the ones who hire the immigrant gardeners and so on. 00:14:15

So what we're seeing is – is a distribution of wealth away from the poor and towards the - the wealthier, which is precisely the opposite direction of all of the social policy in this country. So in a – in a very real sense, immigration policy helps to attenuate and perhaps even reverse the objective of many of the social policies; whereas the typical social policy is through the distribution scheme from the haves to the have nots. Immigration policy within the U.S. context is precisely the opposite. 00:14:49

MAN #12 The recession of 2008 and 2009 may have been precipitated by the housing and financial difficulties within the country, but they also

highlighted the fact that there is some basic incongruities of public policy already, there is some real structural problems; one of which is in our immigration policy is so out of step with a – with our prevailing American – emerging employing trends in the United States and our immigration policy has been flooding workers into the low wage occupations. 00:15:15

And what - that is the people of only high school diploma or less. That doesn't mean everybody whose occupation is unskilled, but it's the blocks the economists use for it and generally it holds. The people who don't have a high school diploma and those who haven't graduated high school are disproportionately concentrated in the low-skilled labor markets. 00:15:31

The recession is – has - has been fought to date by the administrations, the Bush and the Obama administrations, by largely relying on fiscal and monetary policy; the traditional remedies for dealing with unemployment; that is tax cuts, government spending, interest rates. And it's quite clear they're having very little impact or a very slow impact on – on – on the recession. 00:15:53

And basically it's because they're ignoring the way – what the policies really need are those that focus on the labor market directly; one of which is evidently immigration reform. And basic – because this is where the highest unemployment rates are. 00:16:04

NARRATOR And there are those policy makers who think tinkering with our immigration system will have little impact on numbers or the economic well-being of the United States. 00:16:15

FEMALE #2 Trying to move from a 20 or 30 or 40 percent dependence on foreign workers to a totally American workforce would be very, very difficult. The problem is that a lot of industries have become so dependent on having an easy supply of less expensive workers coming in from foreign countries, particularly from Mexico, that the transition towards another type of workforce would be extremely difficult. And

in that sense they have a short-term need for the foreign workers.
00:16:53

The other alternative in many cases is to mechanize, to go with machines rather than people; and that is a possibility, but again it takes time to effect the transition. 00:17:03

To say they don't need the workers is really an – in some ways a nonstarter because the way in which they operate right now and the way in which they are able to provide the goods and services that they produce is very contingent on having a continuing supply of low wage labor. 00:17:28

Yes of course they can get out of it. They can move towards a higher wage labor, but is - will the American consumers pay the higher prices? Can they retool quickly enough to be able to keep up the supply of goods and services? That's another question. 00:17:46

And so we have a very complicated labor market and you don't turn that labor market around immediately. And we need to think about immigration in some cases as being a short- to medium-term fix to what over the longer term is going to require very different solutions.
00:18:08

NARRATOR Possible solutions to the immigration conundrum seem limited and long range to others who have studied the world's population growth. 00:18:16

MAN #13 One of the consequences of a – a sort of an open door policy on immigration is that it takes the pressure off of other governments to deal with the issue. As long as – as Mexico's unemployed can move north of the border in search of jobs and income that they can send home to help sustain the economy, that's a major factor now in the Mexican economy. And as Mexico's oil production drops now and it's dropping very fast, these pressures are going to intensify because oil is probably close to half of the total revenue in the – in – in –

you know for the government of Mexico. If they lose that, it will put enormous pressure on. 00:19:00

So we've got to deal with the population pressure everywhere and – and we need to be thinking worldwide about how we bring population growth to a halt. And I have written in – many, many times in – over the years that the world's leaders, whether the president of the World Bank or the – the Secretary General of the U.N. or the President of the United States should be talking about the consequences of – of continuing population growth and why we need to be thinking about stopping it too, everywhere. 00:19:37

MAN #14 What do we do to close the gap between rich and poor parts of the world? What might we do to create jobs in Mexico or Algeria or Egypt, such that young Mexicans or Algerians or Egyptians would not want to leave to come to Europe or the United States? 00:20:01

Now that becomes a very much more proactive and actually quite radical way of thinking. It's not the negative "keep them out." It's not the medium calibrated "who do we let in and who do we not let in." It's a, "how do we deal with the root cause of this," which is their deprivation, their lack of access to good jobs, their lack of hope in their own countries so that's why they start placing hope elsewhere. But that would involve us in you know really serious policy rethinking's. 00:20:38

There's little evidence of such leadership with vision in the developed world today. We're too beset with our short-term agendas, our political campaigns, our dealing with pressure groups who are also thinking short terms; so our political leaders tend to think short term. 00:21:01

My – my deepest thought is, do we need to have another really catholic experience before we say we really do need to empower international structures and organizations and bodies and international civic society to help handle the challenges of the vast

imbalances between north and south and rich and poor and environmentally advantaged and environmentally deprived.
00:21:36

Or can we not do it because we don't – we – we can't summon the willpower and the insight and the vision to grasp this nettle now. We need the awful stimulus of another catastrophe. 00:21:54

[CHILDREN SINGING *THIS LAND IS YOUR LAND* 00:22:34]

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