

CED Unveils Immigration Reform Plan to Fill High-Shortage Occupations

June 19, 2017 – Washington, D.C. – Today, the Committee for Economic Development of The Conference Board (CED) issued a [report](#) with recommendations for reforming America’s immigration system to fill high-shortage occupations. The study coincides with “tech week,” a series of discussions between the Administration and technology leaders about, among other issues, immigration reform.

As [Immigration Policy That Works](#) details, seismic demographic shifts make reforming the country’s immigration system an economic imperative. By 2030, declining birthrates and the proliferation of retiring baby boomers will lead to near-zero growth in America’s native-born, working-age population. Left vacant, acute labor shortages in three particular fields will significantly constrain the country’s economic growth. The trifecta consists of **healthcare**, including nurses and home health aides; **skilled trades**, including electricians, machinists, and crane operators; and **STEM occupations**, including information security analysts and data scientists.

CED calls for a two-pronged coordinated strategy of retraining Americans for occupations experiencing shortages, and reforming immigration policy so that businesses can better attract and retain foreign talent. The recommendations include:

- **Employ both native-born workers and immigrants to flexibly address looming labor shortages.** *Whenever possible, policymakers should first prioritize education, training, and retraining Americans for jobs that will increase in demand. In our education system, young, native-born workers must be better directed toward occupations facing the most severe shortages.*
- **Remove the annual per-country caps on permanent employment-based immigrant visas.** Immigrants from China, the Philippines, and India have brought critical skills to the U.S. economy for generations. However, there are arbitrary limits on the number of employment-based visas that immigrants from these countries can receive. Making deserving immigrants from these large countries wait years before coming to the United States, while immigrants from smaller countries face no such constraints, convinces some worthy candidates to seek alternative destinations.
- **Move away from educational attainment as the dominant criterion to determine employment-based visas.** Though important, education is only one measure for determining the level of contribution an immigrant will make to the labor market. Often, critical labor shortages do not align with steep educational requirements.
- **Streamline the visa administrative process for in-demand workers.** Businesses are often reluctant to hire non-citizens because of the delay, cost, and uncertainty of obtaining visas. As such, the U.S. should create a process to provide a “fast track” for highly qualified workers to enter its labor market even before they have job offers in hand.
- **Use temporary employment-based visas to fill truly temporary needs.** If firms are unable to fill an opening due to temporarily tight local or national labor market conditions, they should be given an opportunity to hire from abroad for a fixed and non-renewing period. Temporary visas could relieve critical labor supply bottlenecks without reducing wages and job opportunities for native workers.
- **Create state and locally administered employment-based visas.** Governors and mayors have a more ground-level perspective on the needs of their labor markets, based on their day-to-day work, than does

the federal government. As such, the United States should allow state and local governments to issue (or at least designate) a limited number of employment-based visas.

- ***Create a standing Workforce and Immigration Policy Advisory Board to analyze and report immigration issues.*** This independent, bipartisan advisory group would consist of expert members from the policy, academic, and business communities. The President and Congress would appoint members, who would provide advice as it relates to employment-based immigration policy.

View CED's immigration report, social media toolkit, and podcast [here](#).

About the Committee for Economic Development

Founded in 1942, the Committee for Economic Development of The Conference Board (CED) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, business-led public policy organization that delivers well-researched analysis and reasoned solutions to our nation's most critical issues. CED's work is grounded on seven core principles: sustainable capitalism, long-term economic growth, efficient fiscal and regulatory policy, competitive and open markets, a globally competitive workforce, equal economic opportunity, and nonpartisanship in the nation's interest. Learn more at www.ced.org.

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