

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

CHRISTEL SLAUGHTER, PhD, CHAIR
SMALL BUSINESS COUNCIL

TOM SULLIVAN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
SMALL BUSINESS COUNCIL

June 7, 2019

The Honorable Nydia Velazquez
Chairwoman
Committee on Small Business
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Steve Chabot
Ranking Member
Committee on Small Business
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Statement for the Record; Hearing on Immigration and the Small Business Workforce

Dear Chairwoman Velazquez and Ranking Member Chabot:

Thank you for holding a hearing on May 22, 2019 on immigration and the small business workforce. I ask that this statement be included in the Committee's official hearing record.

My name is Ian MacLean, President of Highland Landscaping based in Southlake, Texas and Vice Chairman of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Small Business Council. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce is the world's largest business federation representing the interests of more than 3 million businesses of all sizes, sectors, and regions, as well as state and local chambers and industry associations. Over 99% of private sector businesses in the United States are defined as small.¹ Similarly, the vast majority of Chamber member companies are small businesses and the Small Business Council works to ensure their views are considered as part of the Chamber's policy-making process.

Our Small Business Council Executive Director, Tom Sullivan, outlined the Chamber's small business priorities during a hearing before your Committee earlier this year.² In his testimony, Tom explained that the Chamber has long supported common sense reforms to our broken immigration system, and he stressed that reforming America's immigration system is an economic necessity due to the worker shortage that I personally experience every day as a small business owner.

² *Small Business Priorities for the 116th Congress*, U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Small Business (February 13, 2019), viewable at: <https://smallbusiness.house.gov/calendar/eventsingle.aspx?EventID=367>.

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The focus of our business is the installation of landscaping, irrigation, and drainage in commercial new construction. We have a tremendous and growing need for year-round workers, drivers, and crew managers at our company. The new construction opportunities in North Texas are abundant. However, we are missing many of these opportunities because we do not have the manpower to perform on all of the bids and contracts that are within our grasp. We have been in business for 17 years and only in the last few years has this issue grown into a severe problem. We want to continue to grow our business because the market and opportunities are there, but my inability to find enough workers is the single biggest hindrance preventing me from expanding my operations.

Businesses all over North Texas, and in many other areas of the country, are fighting the same battle. Talk with any developer or general contractor and they will tell you the difficulties they face due to the shortage of workers. Many construction industry companies have unwillingly downsized because they cannot find workers. The worker shortage extends far beyond the construction industry and inhibits business growth in many industries across North Texas.

If businesses like mine across the United States can access workers, we are poised for growth that would benefit our communities. When we grow, we buy vehicles, trailers, tools, equipment, materials, and supplies. Then, we add office staff to manage the additional business, and buy desks, computers, phones, and other office equipment. Then, we upgrade and repair systems and services, renovate buildings, build a new building or move to a bigger one, buy more office lunches and dinners, take more trips, buy new cars, build new houses for our families, and other actions that improve the quality of life for us and our employees.

Immigration reform is key to generating the growth to keep our economy strong. The Chamber believes that efforts to fix our broken immigration system should prioritize the following elements:

- Improving our border security efforts;
- Reforming our employment-based green card system and implementing temporary worker programs to ensure that American businesses can meet their workforce needs;
- Updating the employment verification system in a manner that not only works for businesses of all sizes, but vastly improves upon our ability to verify that workers are authorized for employment in the U.S., and;
- Responsibly addressing the issue of the 11 million people who are living in the U.S. without authorization by providing them with an opportunity to obtain legal status.

We understand that immigration issues are politically contentious and we acknowledge that there are many different ways for Congress to move forward and effectively address these issues. Not every issue must be addressed in one fell swoop. For example, the Chamber supports H.R. 6, the American Dream and Promise Act, which

would provide qualifying Dreamers and Temporary Protected Status (TPS) recipients with the opportunity to obtain lawful permanent residency in the U.S.

Many businesses of all sizes across the U.S. employ Dreamers and TPS recipients, as over 1 million of these people currently possess the legal authorization to work. H.R. 6 would provide them with the certainty that they could remain in the U.S. without fear of deportation, which in turn would provide businesses with the assurance that they need not fear the loss of valued employees.

While providing protections for Dreamers and TPS recipients is critical, there are many other issues that Congress must address to ensure that the United States continues to grow economically. What is most frustrating to Main Street businesses like mine is that from our view, members of Congress seem more intent on scoring political points against their opponents than they are on addressing very serious problems facing the U.S. Border security efforts need to be improved, and the legal immigration system needs to acknowledge economic realities and provide businesses like mine with the ability to hire workers when we cannot find them domestically.

I am confident that lawmakers, working with the Chamber, can find solutions to these problems. We can improve security and provide employers of all sizes and across all industries with the ability to legally obtain the workers they need to grow and create jobs, which, in turn, will help protect the interests of American workers by preventing unauthorized employment in the future.

Thank you for the time your Committee is taking to examine these important issues and I am grateful to be working with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce to make progress on our mutual goals. Please do not hesitate to contact Tom Sullivan, who heads our Small Business Council, if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Ian MacLean". The signature is stylized with a long horizontal line extending to the left and a loop at the end.

Ian MacLean
President
Highland Landscaping
Southlake, Texas