



# Immigration Reform is Worthy of Debate



## Coming up at the Chamber

[View all upcoming events on our Web calendar.](#)

### WED | May 23

Transportation & Goods  
Movement Committee  
Meeting  
[more info](#)

### WED | May 23

Energy, Water &  
Environment Committee  
Meeting  
[more info](#)

### WED | May 30

26th Annual Small Business  
Awards  
[more info](#)

### THU | May 31

Land Use, Construction &  
Housing Committee Meeting  
[more info](#)

### FRI | June 1

Health Care Committee  
Meeting  
[more info](#)

### TUE | June 5

Roundtable Discussion:  
Opportunities in India  
[more info](#)

### TUE | June 5

Member Orientation  
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### TUE | June 5

New Member Reception  
[more info](#)

### WED | June 6

Small Business Owners  
Roundtable  
Let's Talk Technology  
[more info](#)

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A bipartisan group of Senate negotiators last week announced an immigration reform compromise on which debate began this week. The legislation would grant temporary legal status to most of the 12 million illegal immigrants in the country, while allowing them to apply for residence visas and eventual citizenship. For Californians, especially in our region, immigration reform is a top domestic priority.

Of the state's 37 million residents, 26 percent are immigrants. In L.A. County, 36 percent are immigrants and in the City of L.A. the percentage jumps to 41 percent. Indeed, 29 percent of all the immigrants living in the United States are in California.

A guest-worker program would allow as many as 600,000 migrants into the country each year, but they would have to leave after two years. The current visa system, which stresses family ties, would be augmented by a point system that would favor skilled, educated workers. Most of these changes would take effect only after the implementation of tough new border controls and a crackdown on the employment of undocumented workers. Fines, fees, background checks and heightened administrative controls would be parts of the new system as well.

The proposal came under immediate fire from all corners of the political spectrum. "The answers are not simple or easy," said Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) in response. You can only imagine the give-and-take that was required to garner the support of President George Bush, Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.), Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), Sen. Kennedy and the other participants in this bipartisan group. But the group was persistent, as Sen. Mel Martinez (R-Fla.) said, "This is a problem that begs for an answer."

Just over a year ago, Rusty Hammer, my predecessor at the L.A. Area Chamber, wrote a Business Perspective on this issue when Congress was considering a punitive immigration reform bill. Here is an excerpt from what Rusty said:

*Immigration inspires passionate and uncivil debate. It is a debate we must have—although I hope it becomes less contentious than what we see on television and hear on talk radio.*

*No matter how you slice California's economy it is largely dependent on immigrant labor and has been for more than a century. Historically, one only has to think of the construction of the railroads and California's ascent to be the world's agricultural leader.*

*I believe most Americans respect immigrants who come here to work and play by the rules. They come here seeking a better life for themselves and their families. Who can blame them for that?*

*I do not condone breaking the law, but let's face it, if U.S. citizens were willing to take these jobs, they would have already, so immigrant labor is there to fill the void.*

*Leaders from both houses of Congress are meeting to try to craft a compromise immigration reform bill. It's a tough issue, but one that we must deal with now—fairly, even-handedly and compassionately.*

The status quo is not an acceptable alternative for California or the United States, and our Congressional delegation must take the lead in passing legislation this year. The bipartisan proposal that is on the table provides the best starting point available. And it is the best opportunity to take action before the presidential campaign season drowns this issue in sound bites intended to create anger rather than meaningful dialogue.

We need action on immigration reform this summer. In the words of Sen. Feinstein, "Let's not let perfect be the enemy of good."

And that's *The Business Perspective*.



Gary L. Toebben  
President & CEO

by Gary Toebben,  
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Commerce

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*The Business Perspective is a weekly opinion piece by Gary Toebben,  
President & CEO of the Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce,  
produced with the input of Senior Policy Advisor Rusty Hammer.*

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