

# THE MONITOR



## TEXAS MEANS BUSINESS AND BUSINESS NEEDS IMMIGRANTS

Op-Ed by **Justin Yancy**

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Texas means business — in every sense of the word. We're a state that's ready and willing to work, open to investment, and serious about seeing success benefit our communities. A cumbersome immigration system has been a hurdle to that success. The investment immigrants make in our state is sizable, both financially and socially, and their willingness to persevere has been shown time and time again — most notably on the front lines of the pandemic. If we really mean business, we need the incoming Congress to get serious about reimagining the system to allow immigrants to reach their full potential and our economy to fully succeed. Continuing movement around legislation such as the DREAM Act to provide Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA) recipients a pathway to permanent legal status is just one example of many things we can do to build a more equal future for everyone, especially as we work to rebuild from the coronavirus pandemic.

After working in the administrations of two governors, I joined the **Texas Business Leadership Council** (TBLC), where I now serve as president. Our mission is to bring experts, business leaders and resources from diverse sectors together to benefit all of Texas. We recognize that without our state's immigrant community — especially "Dreamers" who came to this country by no fault of their own, who were raised in our communities and taught in our schools the values Texans hold dear — our state's economic success, described as the "Texas Miracle," would have been significantly less. Our shared commitment to a better life is a powerful tool for success.

The benefits immigrants bring to our state are clear, and we need bipartisan, sensible solutions moving forward to reform our immigration system. As a network of business owners and leaders, we applaud the more than 389,000 immigrants in Texas who are entrepreneurs, employing more than 635,000 of their fellow Texans and adding more than \$110 billion to our economy each year. Entrepreneurship is a part of the fabric of our country. The desire to create something new, establish success for your family, and contribute to our economy are all pillars of the American Dream.

Immigrants are helping build that dream, literally and figuratively. Immigrants make up more than 70% of our state's drywall installers, brick and stonemasons, painters, and iron workers. Immigrants also account for 24% of our overall essential COVID-19 response workforce, including health care workers, sanitation workers, agriculture workers, and more. They're reinforcing different sectors of the economy at a time when every industry, and all Texans, are in need of support. Unfortunately, Washington often seems set on making it harder for skilled immigrant workers — who are following the rules — to remain in America using legal tools like H-1B visas. Congress should take action to solidify the role of work visas and other avenues for legal immigration that allow businesses in our country hire the best possible workforce.

I'm proud to be a fifth-generation Texan. I was blessed to grow up in the Rio Grande Valley and complete my education in my home state. I know many of my fellow Texans feel the same way, because they care about their families and communities. Immigrants who want to contribute to our society should be welcome, and we need an immigration system that reflects our values as Americans.

Ultimately, it's time today for a new approach to immigration — one that is based on common-sense, morality and civility — and the latest election proves that we are on the verge of finding common ground with key voters across an array of demographics agreeing that a new immigration initiative that can help empower the nation's economy while keeping families together is needed and desired.

We must have a fair, orderly system that gives immigrants a chance to work toward their own American dream. If we really mean business, we need leaders who understand what it takes to rebuild our economy. The contribution of immigrants is a key piece of that recovery. To continue to compete globally, we need as many hardworking Texans on our team as we can get. As Congress reconvenes, they should prioritize making that team stronger by putting in place real immigration reform.

**Justin Yancy is the president of the Texas Business Leadership Council.**