

CONTRERAS: WE NEED AN IMMIGRATION SYSTEM THAT BENEFITS ALL WORKERS, FARMERS, RANCHERS AND BUSINESSES

By Dayna Reyes

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WESLACO, Texas – Sergio Contreras, president and CEO of the Rio Grande Valley Partnership, is one of a number of top business leaders across Texas to call for comprehensive immigration reform.

RGVP is a member of FWD.us, a bipartisan political organization that believes America's families, communities, and economy thrive when more individuals are able to achieve their full potential.

For too long, the group says, the United States' broken immigration and criminal justice systems have "locked too many people out of the American dream."

Founded by leaders in the technology and business communities, FWD.us says it is seeking to "grow and galvanize political support to break through partisan gridlock and achieve meaningful reforms."

Together, the group states, it can "move America forward."

Contreras said: "The RGV Partnership is a catalyst for prosperity in the Rio Grande Valley – unifying stakeholders in the spirit of collaboration and regional progress and aims to be an influential advocate. This mission is extended through our partnership with FWD.us. Today, our nation's immigration system is beyond broken and needs a unified front across leaders at the federal and state level to get the job done. More than ever, we need an immigration system that will benefit all workers, farmers, ranchers and businesses across Texas, especially in the Rio Grande Valley."

Contreras made his comments as FWD.us announced an expansion of its work to support bipartisan immigration reform through continued partnerships with Texas business organizations and trade associations.

The announcement comes on the heels of the U.S. House of Representatives passing both the Dream and Promise Act and the Farm Workforce Modernization Act to create a pathway to citizenship for certain undocumented individuals and their families.

Contreras said the partnerships FWD.us is building

will include a variety of engagements to highlight the need for bipartisan immigration reform in Texas and across the nation, including public forums, press events, association roundtables, and joint outreach to elected officials.

"Texas' immigrant community is critical to our state's COVID-19 response efforts and overall economic success. Major sectors of our state's economy, including agriculture, food and beverage, energy, and real estate, are fueled by the contributions of immigrants, who are driving innovation, creating American jobs, and boosting economic growth," FWD.us said, in a news release.

"Today, immigrant Texans contribute billions in tax revenue at the federal, state, and local levels, and create millions of jobs for American workers. However, decades of inaction on immigration policies has hindered our state's economic growth while preventing millions of immigrants from contributing their full potential."

Here are the comments of various leaders within FWD.us:

Zaira Garcia, Texas immigration state director for FWD.us:

"FWD.us is excited to continue expanding our immigration work in Texas, especially through these crucial partnerships. Immigration is critical to the economic success of Texas, and to our state's standing as a leading global economy. Throughout the coronavirus pandemic, Texas immigrants – including undocumented individuals – have remained vital to our state's essential workforce, filling roles in industries from healthcare to agriculture, and their continued contributions are needed for a full economic recovery. We have an enormous opportunity to continue building momentum in Congress around bipartisan immigration reform bills and at the state level. By working with local business leaders, we can further emphasize the significant impact immigration has on our state and broader economy to drive meaningful reform in the near future."

Taylor Landin, policy director of the Greater Houston Partnership:

The innovative and entrepreneurial spirit championed by immigrant communities is vital to Houston's success. Today, Houston's more than 280,000 undocumented essential workers are critical to our state's COVID-19 response efforts and are helping fuel our economic recovery. These are workers in industries from farming to healthcare, working to ensure our businesses and communities are able to make it through this global

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health crisis. We look forward to our partnership with FWD.us to advance immigration policies that will improve our economy and communities.”

Chris Wallace, president and CEO, North Texas Commission:

“With more than 1.7 million undocumented immigrants in Texas, including 300,000 undocumented essential workers in the DFW area, immigrants are vital to Texas’ economy and are integral to the fabric of our communities. Today, we have a unique opportunity to get sound, bipartisan immigration reforms across the finish line to better support our immigrant communities and industries they contribute to. Especially as we continue to rebuild from the economic downturn brought on by the coronavirus pandemic, it is time for our leaders at the state and federal level to recognize the immense contributions and positive impact of immigration in Texas. We look forward to doing just that through this continued partnership with FWD.us.”

Melissa Stewart, executive director, Greater Houston Restaurant Association:

“As home to the second largest immigrant population in the U.S., Texans understand just how significant the contributions of immigrants are to economic growth, job creation, innovation, cultural diversity, and beyond. This is especially seen in the restaurant industry, which has long been supported by foreign-born individuals who are integral to the future success of businesses and the broader economy. With an estimated 24 percent of restaurant workers being born in foreign countries, their dedication to the industry and to keeping Americans fed, especially through the coronavirus pandemic, has been unmatched. We are excited to build our partnership with FWD.us to support immigrants and their families as we work towards bipartisan, commonsense immigration reform.”

Justin Yancy, president, Texas Business Leadership Council:

“A cumbersome immigration system has been a hurdle to the success of Texas businesses. 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. In fact, immigrants 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 is in need of support. More than ever, we need a new approach to immigration reform, and are excited to

work on this through our growing partnership with FWD.us to find solutions that meet Texans needs.”

Glenn Hamer, CEO of the Texas Association of Business:

“Immigration has been an integral part of Texas’ past and is key to its future, and now is the time for Congress to develop a bipartisan solution that provides durable protection for Dreamers with a path to citizenship. If these young immigrants were removed, it would result in an annual GDP loss of \$6.1 billion for the Lone Star State and remove a key component of Texas’ workforce. But more importantly, these young men and women are our neighbors, friends and co-workers who have only known the United States as their home, and the Texas Association of Business stands ready to work with its federal representatives to pass immigration reform.”

Amy Graham, president and CEO, Texas Landscape & Nursery Association:

“A stronger immigration system will enable Texas’ foreign-born workforce to supplement our labor needs and power our state’s economy. In fact, more than half of the landscaping industry in Texas today is comprised of foreign-born individuals. However, our nation’s crumbling immigration system often fails those who seek to build a new life for themselves and their families here in the U.S. As Congress works advance legislation such as the bipartisan Farm Workforce Modernization Act to support undocumented individuals and their families who are vital to the agriculture workforce, more can and must be done to ensure Texas immigrants can contribute to their fullest ability. With FWD.us, we look forward to changing the conversation to prioritize an immigration system that benefits all Texans.”