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OPINION: THE TOOLS TO TACKLE TEXAS' LABOR SHORTAGE

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I recently sat down with policy leaders from across the country at a meeting hosted by Business Roundtable in Washington, D.C. As you can imagine, the economy and workforce were top of mind for all of us.

Employers statewide are having varying levels of difficulty finding skilled workers. While there's no one tool that can alleviate this nationwide challenge, there is a toolbox.

Take the Texas Reskilling and Upskilling through Education (TRUE) initiative, for example. This tool was passed by the Texas Legislature in 2021 and focuses on bringing industry and education together to launch or upgrade industry-aligned, high-demand career programs that can be completed in six months or less. Under TRUE, Texas has already directed \$26 million to skills training at 46 colleges and multi-college collaboratives across the state, with \$15 million more recently announced. TRUE also aligns with Texas' Building a Talent Strong Texas strategic plan, which seeks to ensure that, by 2030, 60% of Texans have a postsecondary credential of value, whether that credential is a degree, certificate, or industry-based certification.

Another tool that needs to be highlighted is work-based learning – specifically youth apprenticeships. The Texas Workforce Commission, in conjunction with the Texas Education Agency and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, is doing great work in developing and promoting work-based learning programs around the state. These programs allow high school students to receive paid on-the-job training at companies of all types, from manufacturing to finance, that can lead to great jobs and will improve their chances of success. According to the data from the U.S. Department of Labor, as of 2020, well over one-third of Texas' apprenticeships are for those aged 25 and younger. Employers have the opportunity to work with these motivated students while building their own talent pipelines at the same time.

Lucky for Texas, we have motivated organizations such as Educate Texas, regional workforce boards, and the Texas Association of Community Colleges working together with employers – like our members at the [Texas Business Leadership Council](#) – to create certification and career opportunities.

I can't help but mention one last tool we could have in our economic toolbox: a common-sense immigration system.

It is time for Congress to act by embracing sound policy that will allow DACA recipients permanent legal status, and allow for additional agricultural workers and engineers alike, all while doing more to maintain a secure border.

As you can see, my first tools are fairly non-political; unfortunately, immigration and visa policies are always political. What's frustrating is that it doesn't need to be. All we are talking about is establishing legal, transparent and efficient means to improve our workforce and tax base. A tax base which DACA and DACA-eligible recipients paid in an estimated \$244 million to state and local governments in 2018.

The way immigration is discussed is very often at odds with the reality on the ground. The reality is that we need good hard-working people, at all skill levels, to help keep the Texas economic engine running. According to data from the American Immigration Council, immigrants make up almost 20% of transportation workers in the U.S. and more than 13% of health care workers – one of the most in-demand career fields in the country. With Baby Boomers leaving the workforce and using more health care services, immigration is and will continue to be an economic and workforce issue.

Texas cannot prosper on its good looks alone. We are constantly developing new tools to address our educational, workforce and economic challenges, but we need the political will to bridge the gaps. It takes sound public policy, strong implementation of that policy, and all Texans working together to keep us moving forward.

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