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YANCY: BIDEN MUST ENACT AFFIRMATIVE RELIEF MEASURES TO PROTECT LONG TERM UNDOCUMENTED

By **Justin Yancy**

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*To sustain a strong economy, Texas needs to keep its young labor force growing, writes Justin Yancy, president of the **Texas Business Leadership Council**, in a guest column.*

It's no secret that Texas is a thriving state for business. In April, reports showed that we tripled the U.S. job growth rate, setting records for the most filled jobs and the highest number of employed residents. To sustain our strong economy in Texas, we need to make sure that we keep our labor force growing – and that would not be possible without the contributions of the 3.3 million immigrant workers who call our state home.

As the head of the **Texas Business Leadership Council** (TBLC), I see firsthand the truly vital role that immigrants – including DACA recipients, those with Temporary Protected Status (TPS) and others – play in our state's economy. Immigrants make up nearly a quarter of Texas' labor force, a number that has nearly doubled from three decades prior. Over one million of these workers in Texas are undocumented, representing eight percent of the state's total workforce. At a time when we have more job postings than available workers, we must maximize all available resources by providing lawful protections and work authorization for long-term undocumented residents of the United States.

Approximately three million undocumented individuals contribute immeasurably to our state and the needs of the employers, family, and community members who rely on them. These individuals – many of whom have been here for decades, paying taxes, raising families, and contributing to our economy – should have recognition and protection.

Please don't get me wrong, the United States, like any country, must have strong and effective border security. A primary component to border security is a common-sense and functional immigration system. While I'm in favor of our leaders in Congress coming together to enact meaningful immigration reform, the reality is that "illegal immigration" is presently a campaign wedge issue being used by both parties to turn their supporters out to the polls.

In the meantime, there are several actions that the President can take today that would help these long term undocumented immigrants in Texas and nationwide. The

first is offering parole in place to spouses of U.S. citizens. This would provide stability for millions of mixed status families across the country who live in fear that their undocumented family members will lose their protections or face deportation. In Texas specifically, there are 155,000 undocumented spouses married to U.S. citizens. These individuals who have spent an average of 19 years in the U.S. would add an estimated \$2.3 billion to the economy if they were allowed to live and work here lawfully.

Additionally, the President has the executive authority to extend TPS to nations facing ongoing crises that already meet the statutory requirements. This step aligns with America's humanitarian values and mitigates future irregular migration. TPS (re)designations are not only justified but crucial for preventing further displacement, reducing human trafficking and ensuring the safety of vulnerable populations.

I am constantly hearing from Texas business leaders about the need for additional labor as we are creating jobs faster than we can fill them. The economic contributions of undocumented individuals cannot be overstated. They inject a staggering \$192 billion annually into the U.S. economy. Immigrant workers make up 53 percent of landscaping services, 47 percent of building services, 42 percent of the meat processing industry, 37 percent of construction, and 22 percent of restaurant and food services in Texas. By providing deportation relief and work authorizations, President Biden can expand their contributions, further enriching communities and industries across the nation.

The President has the opportunity to take decisive action and should support what's best for Texas employers and the economic health of our state.

*Editor's Note: The above guest column was penned by **Justin Yancy**, president of the **Texas Business Leadership Council**. Yancy joined TBLC as its president in July 2001. Established in 1994, the TBLC is a statewide network of CEOs and senior business executives who advance a long-term vision of a prosperous Texas in a globally competitive business environment. Yancy is responsible for all aspects of the TBLC's mission and organization including managing membership involvement and overseeing policy work and general operations. The column appears in the Rio Grande Guardian with the permission of the author. Yancy can be reached by email via: yancy@txblc.org.*