

A Growth Strategy

• As the U.S. Congress debates offering amnesty to illegal immigrants, Michigan should continue to welcome foreign-born citizens with open arms. Such a policy may seem counterintuitive given the state's double-digit unemployment rate, but immigration has proven to be an excellent accelerator of job growth.

According to a recent NBI Global Detroit study, 37 percent of foreign-born residents in Michigan have a four-year college degree, as compared to 23.7 percent of U.S.-born Michigan residents. What's more, nearly 2,300 immigrants in Michigan started businesses from 1996 to 2007, meaning foreign-born residents were nearly three times as likely to open a new venture than their native counterparts.

As Michigan strives to reshape its manufacturing economy into a highly skilled workforce for the 21st century, many technical positions are going unfilled. If the state can't find industry experts here, it's better to hire someone from outside the state, including foreign workers, to fill the positions. The alternative is that businesses would pack up and move to where they can find skilled workers. In that case, everyone in Michigan loses.

Opening our arms to immigrants helps on another front, as well. Currently, 23,600 international students attend our colleges and universities, spending a collective \$600 million annually. If we can keep as many of those students here and encourage them to start their own businesses, the entire state wins. Naturally, all immigrants would need to apply for and be granted U.S. citizenship if they want to make Michigan their home. ■