



May 29, 2018

The Honorable Paul Ryan
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Speaker,

The National Roofing Contractors Association (NRCA) urges the House to move forward on immigration reform legislation that addresses U.S. national security and economic needs, including the workforce needs of the roofing industry.

Established in 1886, NRCA is one of the nation's oldest trade associations and the voice of professional roofing industry employers worldwide. NRCA's 3,500 member companies represent all segments of the industry, including contractors, manufacturers, distributors, consultants and other employers who employ more than 250,000 workers in all 50 states. NRCA members typically are small, privately held companies with the average member employing 45 people and attaining sales of about \$4.5 million per year.

A chronic shortage of qualified workers is the most significant limitation on the ability of roofing industry employers to grow their businesses. Most contractors indicate they could be doing 10 to 20 percent or more work if they could fill vacant positions, which translates to an estimated \$3.6 billion to \$7.2 billion in lost economic activity annually. Workforce shortages in our industry are expected to become even more acute in the future because of an aging workforce, educational trends among U.S. workers and ongoing rebuilding efforts resulting from recent hurricanes and other disasters.

NRCA currently is pursuing a two-track approach to the chronic workforce shortages that are approaching crisis proportions within the roofing industry. First, we have been working in support of reforming and expanding career and technical education, and we commend the House for approving the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (H.R. 2353) to help accomplish this objective. NRCA also is developing an industrywide certification program designed to transform training and recruiting efforts throughout the roofing industry.

Legal Immigration is Vital to the Roofing Industry

The second component of addressing the long-term problem of chronic workforce shortages is ensuring a sufficient level of legal immigration to meet economic demand. Despite providing high-paying, family-sustaining jobs (the 2017 median pay for roofing workers was \$18.74 per

hour according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics), the experience of recent decades demonstrates that native workers are not always available to keep up with strong demand in the roofing industry. The BLS projects employment in roofing will grow 11 percent in the decade between 2016 and 2026 (faster than average U.S. job growth), and this demand cannot be met by native-born workers alone. Furthermore, the unemployment rate has fallen to 3.9 percent, the lowest level in 17 years, and is expected to fall even further. As Gerald Seib recently noted in *The Wall Street Journal*: “[T]here is a good case that America’s economy – growing and thriving – has never needed immigrant labor more than it does now.”

Legal immigration that meets the workforce needs of the roofing industry is vital to addressing chronic workforce shortages and boosting economic growth. NRCA supports reform that includes strengthened border security measures; mandatory E-Verify for all employers (the Legal Workforce Act, H.R. 3711); providing a visa system to allow workers to enter the U.S. legally when our economy needs them; and addressing the existing unauthorized workforce in a balanced manner. Sensible immigration reform should combat illegal immigration without encouraging a black-market economy. We believe strengthened border security and mandatory E-Verify for all employers combined with immigration reform that allows for *legal* immigration in accord with economic demand is vital to eliminating illegal immigration.

Congress should establish a visa system that meets the workforce needs of roofing and similar industries. Such a system should be governed by market forces; ensure employers undertake efforts to hire U.S. workers first; is easy for employers to use; and enables job creators to obtain the workers needed to meet demand and grow their businesses and the economy. A visa system similar to that contained in the Agricultural Guestworker Act of 2017 (H.R. 4092) as approved by the House Judiciary Committee in October is vital to the future of the roofing industry.

Some lawmakers have expressed concern that immigration in economic sectors such as roofing may put downward pressure on wages of U.S. workers. However, the experience of NRCA members and recent studies indicate this is not the case. For example, a recent study by the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas found robust low-skilled immigration in Texas during the period 2010-17 was critical to the state’s strong economic growth during that period. Moreover, the study found robust, low-skilled immigration did not have a significant effect on wage growth among native-born workers. In other words, in the 21st century economy, levels of immigration in line with economic demand and demographic trends are essential for strong economic growth because immigrants are complements, not competitors, who work in jobs that otherwise will go unfilled.

Securing America’s Future Act of 2018

NRCA opposes the Securing America’s Future Act (H.R. 4760) as originally introduced because it would reduce legal immigration by an estimated 25 to 40 percent. We agree with the bill’s authors that the security and economic needs of U.S. citizens should be paramount in immigration policy. We support the bill’s goals of reducing illegal immigration through strengthened border security and improved workplace enforcement through expansion of the E-Verify program. However, it is imperative immigration reform recognize the need for legal immigration in sectors like roofing when jobs will otherwise go unfilled. NRCA is concerned

H.R. 4760 would have the effect of reducing future legal immigration, which ultimately would be harmful to the roofing industry, and appreciates the opportunity to work with lawmakers to address this concern.

Dreamers and Border Security

NRCA also urges the House to address the situation of so-called “Dreamers,” unauthorized individuals brought to the U.S. as minor children and who know no other home but the U.S. We support the “Uniting and Securing America (USA) Act” (H.R. 4796) by Rep. Hurd and others, which provides a legalization program for Dreamers and includes measures to improve border security and immigration enforcement. These measures include developing a comprehensive southern border security strategy, increasing the number of immigration judges and attorneys needed to deal with immigration court backlogs, and authorizing increased funding for Operation Stonegarden to support border security operations. If broader immigration reform is not possible at this time, NRCA urges Congress to approve H.R. 4796 or similar legislation to address the predicament of Dreamers and provide for robust border security now.

Temporary Protected Status

Lastly, NRCA supports the Extending Status Protection for Eligible Refugees (ESPERER) Act (H.R. 4184), bipartisan legislation by Rep. Curbelo and others to allow qualified persons who arrived in the U.S. and received Temporary Protected Status (TPS) to adjust to legal permanent resident status. This bipartisan bill would allow individuals from El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and Haiti who have been working *legally* in the U.S. for many years to continue contributing to their communities and our economy. There currently are many individuals working within the roofing industry under TPS, and requiring these individuals to return to their native countries because of the rescinding of TPS will further exacerbate existing workforce shortages. NRCA urges Congress to address this urgent issue by approving H.R. 4184 or similar legislation.

As the debate regarding immigration reform continues, NRCA looks forward to working with lawmakers to develop balanced solutions that fix our broken immigration system and provide for robust economic growth in the roofing industry. Thank you for your consideration of our views on this important issue. For more information, please contact Duane Musser in NRCA’s Washington, D.C., office at (202) 546-7584 or dmusser@nrca.net.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Reid Ribble". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Reid Ribble
CEO

cc. All Members of the U.S. House of Representatives