

sort of certainty our labor markets need.

It is true—maybe except for the great State of North Dakota—that we have made steady progress, but overall unemployment remains too high. We all want to be similar to North Dakota, with a very low unemployment rate. Our economy—the American economy—continues to grow, with Colorado growing at the fourth fastest rate in the Nation. In doing so, many of our business sectors, economic sectors, and industries are experiencing higher labor demand than there is available domestic supply.

Taking agriculture, for example, which is important to the Presiding Officer's State as well, the demand for labor on farms and ranches across the Nation far exceeds the supply of Americans who are willing to fill those jobs. That labor shortage has resulted in crops left to rot in the fields and, therefore, unacceptable economic losses to our communities.

Farmers and ranchers tell me that today they are often left to hire undocumented workers to fill this labor gap. This unregulated, under-the-table hiring hurts immigrants who experience frequent exploitation, constant fear, and often debilitating poverty. It also hurts Americans who experience depressed wages and higher unemployment as a result of competition with this cheap underground workforce. That doesn't make sense.

This immigration reform bill eliminates this unfair competition and ensures that all Americans receive fair wages.

Our current labor supply challenges extend to many other sectors as well. Jobs in science, technology, engineering, and math are growing at three times the rate of other jobs in the United States. With that in mind, and in spite of high levels of unemployment, nearly 100,000 valuable American-based positions in critical high-tech firms, such as IBM, Microsoft, and Intel, have been left unfilled. By 2018, estimates are that this number will increase to 230,000.

This bill, which we are so close to getting across the finish line, focuses heavily on breaking down barriers in our current immigration and visa system to help fill this staggering labor gap and spur our economy in the process. The more flexible market-based system for visas included in this bill will ensure our immigration system only brings workers businesses need. Moreover, this bill will ensure that Americans get a first pass at jobs before foreign workers are eligible to fill them. That is an important element, one that Coloradans have told me they demand.

But it is not only about ensuring that the bill before us doesn't displace current U.S. citizens, I would point out to my friends who are skeptical of this effort that immigrants in this country also have an incredible and phenomenal history of creating jobs.

Let me share a couple numbers with everybody. Between 1990 and 2005, immigrants started 25 percent of the highest growth companies in this country, directly employing over 200,000 people. Since 2007, immigrant-founded small businesses have provided employment for 4.7 million people and generated almost \$800 billion in revenue.

Big-time American companies, such as Intel, Google, eBay, and Sun Microsystems, were all created by immigrants—companies that helped to form the very roots of our thriving tech industry.

I wish to take a minute to thank the Gang of 8 specifically for their efforts to include a section in the bill that creates the INVEST Program, which focuses on incentivizing entrepreneurs, such as the founders of these iconic companies, to come to the United States. This program, which draws on the bipartisan Startup Visa Act I introduced with Senator FLAKE—and includes the work of Senators MORAN, WARNER, and others—will ensure that the next generation of entrepreneurs and job creators can stay in the United States and create good American jobs. Last week, after listening to advocates, Senator WARNER and I filed an amendment that we think will bolster these provisions even further, and we certainly hope our colleagues will think it is a good enough idea to include in the final legislation.

Programs in the underlying bill, such as INVEST, will help supercharge our economy by helping to create thousands of jobs over the next decade.

Ralph Waldo Emerson once said: "America is another word for opportunity." We take pride in our rich history of being a country where the key to earning a valued place in society is through ability and determination, where immigrants from all over the world—alongside third- and fourth-generation Americans—can earn an honest living or start a business. It is incumbent on us, as Members of Congress, to actively ensure that America remains the land of opportunity.

As the Presiding Officer knows, that starts with our children, including undocumented children, our DREAMers, who know of no other place but here as their home.

I wish to close by talking about a DREAMer. His name is Oscar. I wish to make the case for Oscar and his family.

Oscar and his brothers, Juan and Hugo, are the children of parents who illegally immigrated into the United States and brought their kids with them. They now live in my State of Colorado. Throughout their entire lives, they lived in fear of the black cloud of deportation that has hung over them.

I had the pleasure of meeting Oscar here in Washington a couple of months ago. He had a very simple request for a kid who grew up in the United States. He wanted the opportunity for himself and his brothers to come out of the shadows and become someone.

Where are Oscar and his brothers right now? They are in college pursuing degrees in engineering and psychology. Let's design a commonsense policy that will allow them to work after they graduate. Let's give Oscar, and the millions like him, the opportunity to come out of the shadows and become the next generation of American leaders, innovators, and job creators.

This week we are faced with a choice: We can put into place a bill that was negotiated by Members of both sides of the aisle, one that takes historic and far-reaching steps to secure our borders and provides a tough but fair pathway to legal status and an exit from the shadows for those who are here illegally. This bill will help crack down on employer exploitation and help give American businesses the secure and stable workforce they deserve. The other option would be to try and delay this bill and continue on with a broken system that continually undermines our economy by keeping millions in the shadows. We could keep the system that denies the best and the brightest a viable path to citizenship and instead would encourage them to create jobs abroad for our global competitors such as China and India.

Let's not deny Oscar and his brothers the opportunity to come out of the shadows and be the next generation of American workers. Let's continue to work on amendments, and let's pass this comprehensive immigration reform bill this week.

I thank the Presiding Officer for her patience, for her forbearance.

I yield the floor.

RECESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate stands in recess until 2:15 p.m.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 12:54 p.m., recessed until 2:15 p.m., and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Ms. BALDWIN).

EXECUTIVE SESSION

NOMINATION OF PENNY PRITZKER TO BE SECRETARY OF COMMERCE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to consider the following nomination which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read the nomination of Penny Pritzker, of Illinois, to be Secretary of Commerce.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, there is 30 minutes of debate equally divided in the usual form.

The Senator from Illinois.

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, for those who are following the debate of the Senate, we are in the midst of the debate on the immigration reform bill, expecting votes on amendments this