



Immigrants are the key to a knowledge economy

By Mark Zuckerberg April 10, 2013

Mark Zuckerberg is founder and chief executive of [Facebook](#) and co-founder of [Fwd.us](#).

Earlier this year I started teaching a class on entrepreneurship at an after-school program in my community. The middle-school students put together business plans, made their products and even got an opportunity to sell them.

One day I asked my students what they thought about going to college. One of my top aspiring entrepreneurs told me he wasn't sure that he'd be able to go to college because he's undocumented. His family is from Mexico, and they moved here when he was a baby. Many students in my community are in the same situation; they moved to the United States so early in their lives that they have no memories of living anywhere else.

These students are smart and hardworking, and they should be part of our future.

This is, after all, the American story. My great-grandparents came through Ellis Island. My grandfathers were a mailman and a police officer. My parents are doctors. I started a company. None of this could have happened without a welcoming immigration policy, a great education system and the world's leading scientific community that created the Internet.

Today's students should have the same opportunities — but our current system blocks them.

We have a strange immigration policy for a nation of immigrants. And it's a policy unfit for today's world.

The economy of the last century was primarily based on natural resources, industrial machines and manual labor. Many of these resources were zero-sum and controlled by companies. If someone else had an oil field, then you did not. There were only so many oil fields, and only so much wealth could be created from them.

Today's economy is very different. It is based primarily on knowledge and ideas — resources that are renewable and available to everyone. Unlike oil fields, someone else knowing something doesn't prevent you from knowing it, too. In fact, the more people who know something, the better educated and trained we all are, the more productive we become, and the better off everyone in our nation can be.

This can change everything. In a knowledge economy, the most important resources are the talented people we educate and attract to our country. A knowledge economy can scale further, create better jobs and provide a higher quality of living for everyone in our nation.

To lead the world in this new economy, we need the most talented and hardest-working people. We need to train and attract the best. We need those middle-school students to be tomorrow's leaders.

Given all this, why do we kick out the more than 40 percent of math and science graduate students who are not U.S. citizens after educating them? Why do we offer so few H-1B visas for talented specialists that the supply runs out within days of becoming available each year, even though we know each of these jobs will create two or three more American jobs in return? Why don't we let entrepreneurs move here when they have what it takes to start companies that will create even more jobs?

We need a new approach, including:

- Comprehensive immigration reform that begins with effective border security, allows a path to citizenship and lets us attract the most talented and hardest-working people, no matter where they were born.
- Higher standards and accountability in schools, support for good teachers and a much greater focus on learning about science, technology, engineering and math.
- Investment in breakthrough discoveries in scientific research and assurance that the benefits of the inventions belong to the public and not just to the few.

Changes like these won't happen on their own.

That's why I am proud to announce FWD.us, a new organization founded by leaders of our nation's technology community to focus on these issues and advocate a bipartisan policy agenda to build the knowledge economy the United States needs to ensure more jobs, innovation and investment.

These leaders, who reflect the breadth and depth of Silicon Valley's entrepreneurial culture, include Reid Hoffman, Eric Schmidt, Marissa Mayer, Drew Houston, Ron Conway, Chamath Palihapitiya, Joe Green, Jim Breyer, Matt Cohler, John Doerr, Paul Graham, Mary Meeker, Max Levchin, Aditya Agarwal and Ruchi Sanghvi.

As leaders of an industry that has benefited from this economic shift, we believe that we have a responsibility to work together to ensure that all members of our society gain from the rewards of the modern knowledge economy.

We will work with members of Congress from both parties, the administration and state and local officials. We will use online and offline advocacy tools to build support for policy changes, and we will strongly support those willing to take the tough stands necessary to promote these policies in Washington.

Across America, creative, hardworking people in coffee shops, dorm rooms and garages are creating the next era of growth. Let's embrace our future as a knowledge economy and help them — and all of us — reach our full potential.



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