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Entrepreneurs Key to Fixing Our Broken Immigration System

Posted by Aneesh Chopra on May 16, 2011 at 02:29 PM EDT

Last week, President Obama [called](#) for a [national conversation](#) on how to fix our broken immigration system so it works for the 21st Century economy. On Thursday, I joined [25 entrepreneurs](#) -- drawn from the local business community and attendees of the inspiring [Big Omaha conference](#) -- in Omaha, NE, to engage in such a discussion. Though many in the room hadn't known each other, we quickly shared personal stories of hope and frustration with the current immigration system.

Given the high-tech focus of many of the entrepreneurs in the room, the message I heard was clear -- if we are to effectively compete in the global economy, we need access to the very best talent our communities can attract, especially in regions that lack the kind of talent concentration one finds in areas like Silicon Valley or Austin, TX.

I met Nick Hudson, a British-born entrepreneur three times over who described the Omaha community as very welcoming of immigrants, despite the difficulties of navigating our national immigration system.

I met an immigrant entrepreneur whose daughter successfully completed a master's degree in engineering, precisely the kind of science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) training the President has [emphasized](#) as key to our economic future, but who lacked a clear pathway to join our workforce.

To that end, I shared news from Washington that, effective immediately, an expanded pool of STEM graduates qualifies for an additional 17 months of optional practical training, exposing the best and brightest to our [economic growth engines](#).

Best of all, I heard feedback that we might be able to address administratively, including calls for:

- clearer, simpler rules to navigate the legal immigration system and
- clarity on the importance of immigrant entrepreneurs when adjudicating applications.

I want to thank the Omaha Chamber of Commerce and the folks organizing Big Omaha for convening last Thursday's roundtable, and for the participants who pledged to continue the discussion with their friends and neighbors. I left Omaha with a bit more confidence that we can finally tackle this important component of our economic growth strategy. Please join us in this conversation by [hosting a roundtable](#).

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US CTO Aneesh Chopra poses with participants of a roundtable discussion on fixing our broken immigration system, May 12, 2011. (Photo courtesy Shervin Pishevar)

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