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I thank you for the opportunity to visit.

I am here today as a Yuma business person - I am involved with agriculture and other enterprises, but before we get to that, I am first a local citizen.

I am involved with the civic, political and religious life of this community and this state.

As a citizen I am unhappy with the emotion, rhetoric and language we use in many venues on immigration. Just like elections matter - words matter and the words we have chosen are not the words of my principles or beliefs.

Since colonial times, Americans have managed to scapegoat their issues and ills on whatever immigrant group was handy. Along the way we have managed to impugn most ethnic, racial and religious groups in their immigrant status.

Our practice has developed into a finely honed art - its time we threw this art out with the trash.

Author Lina Newton, in her book "Illegal, Alien or Immigrant" argues that the narrative that has been laid out against our neighbors to the south is so harsh and multi-layered, it has been made almost impossible to have rational debate.

She does not take a side, but only points out the issues. What passes for fact as to immigration is mostly myth. I appreciate the freedom of the internet to allow so many voices, but many of these voices are ruled by rumors and legends - don't let them rule your life.

I applaud this conference in the effort to at least change the tone or otherwise pump the volume down.

But I was invited here as a business person - not a social commentator - my main business is agriculture. Irrigated and specialty crop agriculture now and into the future will remain labor intensive.

Looking ahead technology and robotics will help, but just the complex skill of hand and eye coordination in fresh produce will not be easily or affordably replicated by technology. Further the technology and equipment to harvest one crop won't work for another. For example, head lettuce is not cabbage is not romaine – so it depends as to what specific product are we talking about?

So I have a business agenda - I need reforms in the visa programs that will promote a legal and reliable labor supply. I can't create labor. I cannot generate it on my own. Labor is a commodity beyond my control, although when you speak of labor as people it is something entirely different. But as a commodity or source or pool, I have no control - nor does Yuma for that matter.

If I can't get those reforms, then it will be more difficult for me to recruit labor, because my labor supply is not going to be generated from native born Americans. Those who argue otherwise simply don't know.

Complicating this is a hardened attitude on border security, the economy, and Arizona's attempts to control immigration on their own, an aging labor supply and a growing tendency for our neighbors to the south, especially the younger ones to remain at home.

Border security is a legitimate issue, but it does rankle me for those who have hijacked border security for political reasons. For them the border will never be secure enough to tackle immigration reform.

And if you are truly devoted to border security, there must be recognition it requires a variety of tools. Wouldn't visa reform - a method to move labor as commerce efficiently and legally back and forth across the border be a tool

you would want to use for border security?

Since visa reform is dismissed by these folks - we will deal with it later they say - it leads me to believe there is more at work here than simply border security. But that is the history of this issue.

There have been recent and significant efforts to obtain visa reform for agriculture within the congressional debate over mandatory E-Verify. For all of the effort, and we must keep trying, the stars are not aligned – in part because the discussions and interchanges we are having here today are simply not occurring with the frequency they should.

As I said, agriculture's labor force is aging, the pool is shrinking and there continue to be more restrictions. As a business person I don't have an immigration problem - I have a labor problem.

Yuma's agricultural diversity is vast and it creates huge economic infrastructures for this area. It is innovative, but it cannot last without reforms to our visa system.

We need efficient methods to move labor back and forth across the border and we need visas for more permanent workers.

We also need to begin thinking as to where our labor will be sourced in the future - 10 years ago we said it will not always be Mexico - there are indications this will be proven true. There are a variety of forces at work that are measurably slowing the flow of folks north.

Regardless of the source, the method for me to obtain labor on a visa is painfully bureaucratic, slow, inconsistent and not timely and it does not work.

The last thing I will say might sound a little strange for an agricultural businessman, but it involves education. For an area that relies heavily on immigration we need to continue to pay attention to our local education. Its not just a matter of matching education and training to skills required. We must communicate across mixed cultures and language, and our schools at all levels play a role

You know good and factual communication and understanding is sorely lacking on this whole issue of immigration - lets insure we are doing our individual parts.

Thanks for listening.