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Congress must solve immigration crisis

My steel fabricating company employs 85 people in Phoenix, and finding qualified workers is one of our biggest challenges.

The construction industry is not alone. Agriculture, tourism and other service industries also are experiencing a labor crunch.

Offering more money would seem like the answer. But over the past year, my company has raised wages 25 percent and still can't find enough qualified workers.

What Arizona employers need is a way to recruit qualified workers from outside the country, workers who have the skills we need to keep our economy growing.

Regretfully, federal law caps visas for essential workers at a mere 5,000 a year. In the construction trades alone, our nation needs 240,000 new workers every year.

Clearly, the current system is not set up to serve the needs of a robust economy that allows everyone to prosper. Instead, what we have is a border security and immigration system in crisis.

Our schools, hospitals and criminal justice system are unfairly burdened with the cost of illegal immigration. And tragically, hundreds have died of thirst and exposure in the Arizona desert while this issue goes unresolved.

Arizona legislators and voters have tried to wrestle with the problem through new laws and ballot initiatives, but the crisis persists.

Still, there is reason for hope.

In the U.S. House of Representatives, Rep. Jeff Flake joined with his Arizona colleagues Sens. Ed Pastor, Raul Grijalva and Gabrielle Giffords in



MY VIEW

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sponsoring the Strive Act, which addresses the issues that need to be part of comprehensive reform legislation.

In the U.S. Senate, Sen. Jon Kyl and others are working to create a viable bipartisan bill that will secure our borders; give employers the tools to verify employment eligibility; provide for temporary guest workers to perform jobs Americans won't do; and create a process to bring undocumented immigrants out of the shadows without amnesty.

If a bill is going to pass the 110th Congress, it must happen within the next three months. After that, 2008 presidential and congressional politics will take over.

That is why a group of more than 100 employers and trade associations came together during the past few months to form a coalition called Arizona Employers for Immigration Reform.

We have met with our congressional delegation, and we are sponsoring radio and television messages to help gather grassroots support for a solution to our illegal immigration problem.

We urge business owners to act now to support legislation to replace our unregulated, chaotic and abusive immigration system with one that is secure, controlled and fair.

Sheridan Bailey, president of Ironco Enterprises in Phoenix, is co-founder of Arizona Employers for Immigration Reform, www.azeir.org.