Madam President, I rise to speak on the Budget Resolution that will soon come before us, and the opportunity it represents to finally provide a pathway to citizenship for millions of our neighbors, friends, and family members.

I rise today on behalf of the people who are the subject of our immigration debate.

The immigrants who have lived and worked in communities throughout the United States for years—sometimes decades—while stuck in the limbo Congress created.

Our nation depends on the labor of immigrants.

There has been bipartisan agreement on this for generations.

But while our nation depends on the labor of immigrants, we do not provide the pathways to citizenship that these individuals and their families have earned. Today, we stand on the brink of a historic opportunity to adopt long-overdue reforms to our immigration system.

I rise to share just a few stories of the people on whom our nation depends and for whom we need to act.

In May, I had the honor of welcoming Rose Tilus to testify before the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration, Citizenship, and Border Safety, which I chair. Rose was born in Haiti, but fled gang violence and political instability at the age of 17. Alone, in an unfamiliar country, she dreamed of becoming a nurse.

But Rose’s immigration status kept that dream out of reach. For ten years, she sustained herself working as a housekeeper and as a babysitter. Rose’s life changed in 2010, when a devastating earthquake in Haiti allowed her to obtain a work permit under a program called Temporary Protected Status, or TPS. She seized this opportunity to return to school and fulfill her dream of becoming a nurse—serving and caring for others in nursing homes, hospitals, and community health centers. While Rose’s story is the story of the American dream – her legal status in our country is all too temporary.

Our nation’s economy has always depended on the dreams, the dedication, and the contributions of immigrants.

No state knows this better than California, the fifth largest economy in the world, where nearly a quarter of America’s immigrants live and call home. Immigrants make up 27% of California’s population, and they are essential to our success in every industry.

From farmworkers in the Central Valley to tech innovators in Silicon Valley.

From construction and domestic workers to nurses and teachers.

In fact, during the COVID-19 pandemic, our country has relied even more on the essential work of immigrants. More than 5 million undocumented workers have held jobs that the federal government deems essential during the pandemic.

TPS-holders like Rose care for our loved ones in hospitals and nursing homes.

DACA recipients like Erika Henriquez, a medical assistant, help to distribute COVID tests and life-saving vaccines.

Farmworkers like Vicente Reyes and his parents show up to work every day to keep grocery store shelves stocked and put food on our tables.

As has been the case since the founding of our nation, immigrants are serving at the heart of the American story.

An overwhelming, bipartisan majority knows that people like Rose, Erika, and Vicente have earned the right to live here without fear of deportation. 70% of Americans support creating a pathway to citizenship for TPS holders, Dreamers, and farmworkers. That includes a majority of Democrats, Republicans, and Independents.

Colleagues, right now, we have an opportunity to provide stability and security for the very workforce that the Department of Homeland Security, beginning with the Trump Administration, has deemed essential to our nation’s economy and security. As we write a reconciliation bill to create an equitable and sustainable economic recovery, we must include immigration reform.

We have strong arguments and precedent from this very body in our corner.

The logic is simple.

Providing a pathway to citizenship is a direct government action, not some carrot and stick approach involving private businesses and private actors. Newly eligible immigrants would pay fees – directly to the U.S. Government – as part of this direct government action, which would then be processed by government employees. Every step of this process involves direct government action and direct government revenues, expenditures, and personnel. And by expanding pathways to citizenship, we will grow our economy and improve workplaces for all.

That’s precisely the spirit and intent of the infrastructure investments that we are developing as part of the budget reconciliation bill.

Research by the Center for American Progress shows that providing a pathway to citizenship for Dreamers, TPS holders, farmworkers and other essential workers will boost GDP by $1.5 trillion over 10 years. It will raise wages for all American workers. It will create over 400,000 new jobs. And it will generate billions of dollars of spending and tax revenue, fueling our economic recovery.

Madam President, we have more than an opportunity—we have an obligation – to pass meaningful immigration reform as part of the upcoming reconciliation bill.

For Rose, Erika, and Vicente.

For the millions of essential workers and long-term residents who lack permanent status.

For the bipartisan majority of Americans who support reform for their immigrant friends, families, and neighbors.

And for every one of our constituents—because ALL Americans will see the economic benefits of immigration reform.

Señora Presidente, hoy no solo tenemos una oportunidad, tenemos una obligación de tomar acción e incluir un camino a la ciudadanía para inmigrantes en el proyecto de ley de reconciliación.

Para los millones de trabajadores esenciales y miembros de nuestras comunidades que aun buscan la residencia permanente.

Para la mayoría bipartidista de estadounidenses que apoyan estas reformas para sus familias, amigos y vecinos inmigrantes.

Y para todas nuestras comunidades, porque TODOS los estadounidenses verán los beneficios económicos de estas reformas migratorias.

Madam President, I recently met with President Biden in the Oval Office to discuss California’s immigration needs. I’m thankful for President Biden and Vice President Harris’s unequivocal support for including immigration reforms in the budget reconciliation process. We have an opportunity and responsibility to bring security to millions of essential workers and their families.

I urge my colleagues to join me in recognizing the essential work and economic contributions of immigrants—by opening their pathway to citizenship, and the American Dream.

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