

Viewpoints

Don't fence out the most talented

Top of Utah Voices



Michael Vaughan

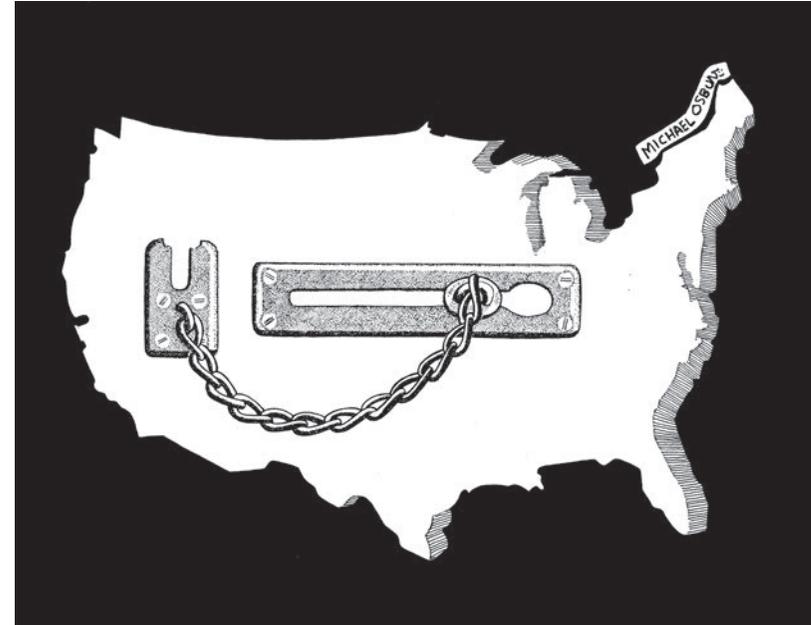
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Commentary

Michael Vaughan is Weber State University's provost. He accepts e-mail from readers at MVAUGHAN@Weber.edu

of India who immigrated to the U.S. to study and practice medicine. The talented piano student is named Fan-Ya Lin, and she is from Taiwan. If she comes to WSU, she will study with another talented Taiwanese pianist, professor Yu-Jane Yang. The co-founder of Google is Sergey Brin, a native of Moscow.

A neglected aspect of the current immigration debate is that legal immigrants fill a disproportionate share of the nation's knowledge-based jobs. For the modern economy, highly-educated workers are critical, and immigrants are filling a significant number of these important jobs.

Consider some interesting facts. Foreign nationals account for almost 60 percent of the science and engineering doctoral degrees awarded by U.S. universities. Only



14 percent of California high school graduates meet the admissions standards of the University of California.

On the other hand, almost a third of the Asian high school students meet the rigorous standards for admission; these students are either immigrants or the children of recent immigrants. In recent years, 75 percent of the piano students entering the Julliard School of Music were from foreign countries.

These statistics lead to some

inescapable conclusions. The country's shortage of engineers would be severely exacerbated if the number of immigrants filling engineering jobs was reduced. It would be difficult to find a major symphony orchestra that could mount a modest performance without the talent of foreign-born musicians.

Immigrants are also a driving force for entrepreneurship. As one example, when the state of Utah sought someone to serve as chair of the Governing Authority

for The Utah Science Technology and Research initiative, Dinesh Patel was chosen because of his vast experience in starting new businesses and fostering technology-based business ventures. Dinesh is the founder or a principal investor in more than 20 high-tech companies. He was born and raised in Zambia, Africa, and educated in India.

Our nation's immigration policy will be one of the focal points of the upcoming presidential election. One aspect of the immigration debate is the fact that U. S. companies are turning to undocumented workers to meet their needs for manual labor. The raids on Universal Sales in Lindon and the Swift meat packing plant in Hyrum highlight this aspect of the debate.

Regrettably, efforts to tighten immigration policy have also reduced the flow of the most talented seeking to enter the United States. Annual visas granted to international students are down about 20,000 since the start of the decade.

Talent is a scarce commodity. Those forming immigration policy should strive to create a simple, fair and legal process that not only allows but encourages the world's best entrepreneurs, engineers, scientists and artists to immigrate to our country.

I need to ask readers to indulge me for a moment. I am going to relate some seemingly unconnected items which have occupied my time and attention in recent weeks. Please trust that there is some coherency in these scattered thoughts.

My mother has suffered from arthritic knees for several years. A few days ago, I received an encouraging e-mail from her. She had finally found a competent and sympathetic doctor. I am pleased that she has found a doctor who has her confidence.

Last Thursday, I met with an extremely talented student we are trying to recruit to Weber State University. She is a pianist who is also being recruited by the Julliard School of Music. It would be quite an accomplishment to attract her to WSU.

Hardly a day goes by that I don't use Google, the Internet search engine. Google is changing the way we store and retrieve information. I am thankful that there are brilliant minds that can create useful technology like Google.

Is there some way to connect the dots across these disparate items? The theme that connects these items is immigration. More specifically, immigrants contribute greatly to the nation's pool of talent.

My mother's doctor is a native