

Influential immigrants talk about impact they have on Tennessee's economy

By Najahe Sherman

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NASHVILLE, Tenn. (WKRN) – On Tuesday, representatives with the Department of Homeland Security released two new memos saying they are going to hire 15,000 new employees to help with enforcement.

In response, business leaders went to Tennessee's capitol to talk about the impact immigrants have on the state's economy.

"We are here today for one reason. We are here to provide better information. I think the key part of this debate or the confusion is because we don't have accurate data," said Dr. Ming Wang, one of several business leaders who discussed immigration reform at Legislative Plaza.

Data released from the New American Economy shows the economic significance of immigrants in Tennessee.

According to the report, immigrants in Tennessee have a household income of \$7.9 billion. They paid more than \$493 million in state and local taxes and have a spending power of \$5.9 billion.

Immigrants account for more than 21,400 of Tennessee's entrepreneurs and provide jobs for more than 57,000 Tennesseans through immigrant-owned firms.

The immigrants News 2 spoke with hope exposing lawmakers to the new data will help them make better policies to help the entire community.

"I am here to share my story. I think there is a lot misunderstanding about what immigrants do and what we can offer and do offer to this country we are so grateful for," said Fabian Bedne, who immigrated to Nashville from Argentina.

Bedne has served as a member of the Metro Council since 2011.

"When I was growing up, there was a dictatorship. A military dictatorship. My older brother was serving in the military. He was kidnapped and we never saw him again. I



Dr. Ming Wang with President Ronald Reagan
(Courtesy: Dr. Ming Wang)

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brother was serving in the military. He was kidnapped and we never saw him again. I lived through the dictatorship in fear, because back then when they would come after one, they would come after the whole family," said Bedne.

Bedne now owns an architectural firm and enjoys giving back to the community through his role in Metro Council.

"We know that is good for our economy. If people want to come here and be productive, if people want to come here and start businesses, we all benefit," said Ralph Schulz the Nashville Chamber Commerce President.



Dr. Wang told News 2 immigration reform is a cause he feels passionately about because he is also an immigrant.

"I grew up in China during the cultural revolution when millions of youth were deported, to the poorest part of the country and condemned to a lifetime of poverty and hard labor," said Dr. Wang.

Dr. Wang moved to the United States when he was 21 years old with only \$50 in his pocket and a dream.



(Courtesy: Dr. Ming Wang)

He proceeded to obtain degrees from Harvard Medical School and MIT. Dr. Wang is considered one of the leading eye surgeons in the nation and he is based here in Nashville.

According to the New American Economy, more than 322,000 immigrants call Tennessee home.

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