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CONTACT
Angelena Bradfield – 202 506-4541
abradfield@immigrationworksusa.org

BUSINESS WORKING GROUP

As organizations representing employers from virtually every sector of the U.S. economy, we're pleased to see immigration reform back on the national agenda – pleased to see President Obama use his political capital to endorse an overhaul and grateful to reform champions Sens. Charles Schumer and Lindsey Graham for their courage and hard work in crafting what an outline published this week suggests will be a balanced, bipartisan bill.

This weekend, on the heels of the Senators' statement and with immigration advocates from around the country traveling to Washington to demonstrate on the Mall, we feel it's important to underline what we believe are the most pressing reasons for reform – U.S. economic and security interests.

The economic downturn has done nothing to change the fundamental demographic and educational trends that make foreign workers an essential ingredient of American prosperity. Even with today's high unemployment, employers in many sectors – agriculture, high-tech, the seasonal economy – who have made every effort to hire qualified American workers continue to need immigrants to keep their businesses open and contributing to the economy. And as the economy improves, that need will only grow – global talent and less-skilled manpower alike will play an essential role in the nation's economic recovery.

The employers we represent support a comprehensive reform package that secures the borders, reinforces the rule of law in the workplace, protects U.S. workers and addresses the millions of unauthorized foreigners already living and working in the United States.

But for a reform bill to work – for employers or for the U.S. economy – it must also provide a way for the workers we'll need to grow the economy in the future to enter the country legally.

That's the piece of the puzzle that often gets short shrift when Americans think about the rationale for reform. Some advocates have even said that element is politically impossible this year and that Congress should try to solve the problem without it.

But as Sens. Schumer and Graham acknowledge in their outline, without that piece, there can be no hope of fixing the broken immigration system.

The best – the only – way to control illegal immigration is to create a legal immigration system that works. Ultimately, that's the only way to secure our borders and restore the rule of law. It's also the only way to prevent the human suffering and social costs that come with illegal immigration.

No one has more of a stake in fixing the broken system than employers who rely on immigrant workers. But it has to be reform that works for all Americans and for the U.S. economy. We look forward to working with Congress to pass a balanced, bipartisan reform package.

American Farm Bureau Federation
American Hotel & Lodging Association
American Meat Institute
American Moving & Storage Association
American Nursery & Landscape Association
Americans for Immigration Reform
Essential Worker Immigration Coalition
Federation of Employers and Workers of America
ImmigrationWorks USA
International Franchise Association
National Chicken Council
National Council of Chain Restaurants
National Milk Producers Federation
National Restaurant Association
National Turkey Federation
Professional Landcare Network
United Fresh Produce Association
U.S. Chamber of Commerce

The Business Working Group is an ad hoc coalition of coalitions from across economic sectors that employ immigrant workers – high-skilled, lesser-skilled, agricultural and seasonal workers essential to American prosperity and growth.