



**STATEMENT**  
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## A WELCOME OPENING SALVO

*WASHINGTON – Republican lawmakers in the House and Senate announced legislation today to create a new, state-based guest worker program. Companion bills sponsored by Sen. Ron Johnson (WI) and Rep. Ken Buck (CO-4) would allow states to design their own guest worker programs, granting visas to workers seeking to enter the U.S. and potentially to those already in the country. ImmigrationWorks USA president Tamar Jacoby made the following statement.*

The Johnson and Buck bills are an important breakthrough – a thoughtful approach to policy and a welcome new direction for the congressional debate about immigration. Better immigration enforcement is essential, on the border and in the interior. But America will not fix its broken immigration system with enforcement alone. The best antidote to illegal immigration is a legal immigration system that works, creating lawful channels for incoming workers who fill jobs when there are not enough willing and able Americans, growing the U.S. economy and boosting American economic competitiveness.

Modeled on an innovative approach working well in Canada, the Johnson-Buck bills would allow states to create their own guest worker programs. Some states will take advantage of the opportunity, launching robust state-based systems. Others may not act at all. Some will admit highly skilled global talent, others will have greater need for farm hands or less-skilled nonfarm workers. Still others will use the program to regularize unauthorized workers. This flexibility makes sense in a country as diverse as the United States. No two state economies are alike. Why should they approach immigration the same way? It could also make sense politically: let voters decide how many and what kind of immigration is right for their states.

The bills give the states just enough room to maneuver, but not too much. There are limits to the number of visas a state can issue, and the program is designed to complement, not replace, federal guest worker programs. Other important provisions: state programs must allow workers to move from employer to employer within the state – the labor right that underpins all other labor rights – and guest workers who wish to stay permanently in the U.S. can apply for permanent status.

These would be welcome bills at any time – creative and thought-provoking. But they are especially encouraging in today's Washington, where few other lawmakers are giving thought to how to fix the immigration system, and those who are have focused mainly on limiting our intake, not finding legal options for the foreign talent we need to work alongside Americans and help grow the pie for everyone. The Johnson-Buck approach isn't the whole answer – it doesn't fix everything that's wrong with the immigration system. But it's a promising first step – the opening salvo of a long overdue conversation.

**IW president Tamar Jacoby can be reached for comment at 202 568-8108.**

*ImmigrationWorks USA is a national federation of employers working to advance better immigration law. The network links major corporations, trade associations and state-based coalitions of smaller business owners concerned that the broken immigration system is holding back the nation's economic growth. Their shared aim: legislation that brings America's legal intake of foreign workers more realistically into line with the country's labor needs.*