



**STATEMENT  
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## ENDING ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION

*With immigration reform moving forward in the House and Senate, the debate about temporary visa programs is intensifying. On Thursday, the Senate Judiciary Committee marked up the Border Security, Economic Opportunity and Immigration Modernization Act's W Visa program for less-skilled immigrant workers. On Friday, the bipartisan House group working to craft comprehensive reform said it will release a bill with two different proposed temporary worker programs, one Democrat and one Republican. ImmigrationWorks USA president Tamar Jacoby made the following statement:*

As Congress rolls up its sleeves and wrestles with the nitty gritty of immigration reform, members are discovering there's a lot more to it than the 11 million unauthorized immigrants already living in the United States. As important if not more so: fixing the legal immigration system so it works for the future.

This was a key focus of the debate in Congress last week, with both the Senate Judiciary Committee and the House bipartisan "secret group" considering whether and how to improve the worker visa provisions in the Gang of Eight Senate bill. As it turned out, neither deliberation produced improvements – but the debate has just begun.

The good news: lawmakers in both chambers, particularly Republican lawmakers, are increasingly focused not just on how a low-skilled visa program would work, but also on the critical role it can and must play in preventing illegal immigration in decades to come.

Texas Sen. John Cornyn used projections of labor demand in the construction industry to demonstrate that the low-skilled visa quotas in the Senate bill will not be ample enough to fill empty construction jobs with legal immigrants. Utah Sen. Mike Lee argued persuasively that a workable temporary worker program will be an "indispensable" part of preventing illegal immigration in the future.

In the House, Republican members of the drafting group were so concerned that the Senate bill's visa program will be inadequate to meet U.S. labor needs – will not succeed in rechanneling today's illegal flow into legal channels – that they almost broke with Democrats in the group and are now on track to release a bill with two alternative temporary worker programs, one Democrat, one Republican.

Republican Sens. Orrin Hatch and Ted Cruz also used their time in the Judiciary markup to propose improvements to the legal immigration system, streamlining visa processing and significantly expanding quotas. And the committee voted 17-to-1 against an amendment, proposed by Sen. Jeff Sessions, to sharply cut the number of visas to be issued under the Senate bill.

Our prediction: this debate is going to expand and deepen in months to come, as more Republicans in both chambers focus on the argument Sen. Lee put forward in markup – that we as a nation have made illegal immigration too easy and legal immigration far too hard.

**ImmigrationWorks USA president Tamar Jacoby can be reached for comment at 202 480-2076.**

*ImmigrationWorks USA is a national federation of employers working to advance better immigration law. The network links major corporations, national trade associations and 25 state-based coalitions of small to medium-sized business owners concerned that the broken immigration system is holding back the nation's economic growth. Their shared aim: legislation that brings America's annual legal intake of foreign workers more realistically into line with the country's labor needs.*