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A first, essential step toward reform

(Washington, March 19) – *Sens. Charles Schumer and Lindsey Graham published an op-ed piece in the Washington Post today laying out a framework for comprehensive immigration reform. ImmigrationWorks USA president Tamar Jacoby issued the following statement.*

ImmigrationWorks USA hails the framework released today by Sens. Schumer and Graham – a courageous, important step toward enactment of comprehensive immigration reform.

The Schumer-Graham outline is a balanced, bipartisan proposal, in its own words, “tough but fair.” Its purpose is to gain control of immigration into the United States, establishing an adequate, workable legal entry system and restoring public confidence in our ability to regulate who and how many foreigners we admit.

The most important feature of the proposal is its recognition that immigration reform rests on three vital legs – enforcement on the border and in the workplace, a program to bring needed workers into the country legally and a practical answer for the millions of unlawful immigrants already living and working here.

As a federation of employers, ImmigrationWorks welcomes the prospect of effective enforcement. Most employers who hire immigrants want to be on the right side of the law, and they want to operate on a level playing field. As long as the system can deliver the workers they need to keep their businesses open and running at full capacity, they benefit from employment verification and tough sanctions on employers deliberately flouting immigration law. The devil will be in the details in designing and implementing a biometric verification regime, but there can be no question that we need a system capable of combating identity theft.

The framework’s answer for unlawful immigrants strikes a thoughtful balance, upholding the integrity of the law while also recognizing the way that unrealistic policies of past decades made it all too easy to make a mockery of the law.

But most encouraging for employers are the framework’s provisions to admit needed workers legally in years ahead.

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 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.

The Schumer-Graham framework should appeal to Republicans and Democrats alike, generating momentum for a legislative debate and ultimately, when the political climate permits, for passage of comprehensive reform.

Congratulations, Sens. Schumer and Graham – this is an excellent start.

**IW USA president Tamar Jacoby can be reached for comment
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ImmigrationWorks USA is a national business federation advocating immigration policy that works for employers, workers and citizens. The organization links 25 state-based coalitions of employers and trade groups from every sector that relies on immigrant workers. IW assists these groups with strategic coordination, messaging and grassroots recruitment as they fight for better immigration law in their states and Washington. IW's goal: to mobilize a national business constituency in favor of immigration reform. The organization works closely with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the National Restaurant Association, the National Association of Home Builders, the U.S. Travel Association, American Farm Bureau and other leading trade groups. Its board of directors includes former U.S. Commerce Secretary Carlos Gutierrez, former AZ Rep. Jim Kolbe and Bill Marriott, chairman and CEO of Marriott International, among others.

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