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Immigration reform – reports of its death are exaggerated

(Washington, January 28) – *Last night, in his first State of the Union address, President Barack Obama called on Congress to fix immigration. In response, ImmigrationWorks USA president Tamar Jacoby sent the following statement to her organization's national network of grassroots employers – small business owners across America committed to advancing immigration reform.*

Friends –

Here it is, in case you missed it – the sentence on immigration in the State of the Union.

“We should continue the work of fixing our broken immigration system,” President Obama said, “to secure our borders, enforce our laws and ensure that everyone who plays by the rules can contribute to our economy and enrich our nation.”

It was just a sentence, but it was an important sentence – because it means that comprehensive immigration reform is still alive, and the president is still committed to advancing it.

Let's not kid ourselves. The special election in Massachusetts made the road ahead harder – at least in the short term. Lawmakers in both parties were spooked by the outpouring of voter anger. And many, on both sides of the aisle, will now be even more afraid than they were before to take a tough vote on what they perceive as a controversial issue.

But that's only the short term – and let's not extrapolate too far into the future.

Because the real lesson of Massachusetts is that American voters want solutions. They want Congress to stop bickering, to put aside radical, partisan proposals and to start working together in a pragmatic, consensual way to solve the tough problems we face as a nation.

And if lawmakers can hear that message – hear and respond to it - we could see a dramatic shift in the climate in Washington. This won't happen overnight, it won't come easily to either party. But if the climate changes in this way, the chances of passing immigration reform will improve - dramatically.

Bottom line: we need to stay engaged. The battle is far from over. Senators Charles Schumer and Lindsey Graham are still working, with business input, to craft an overhaul package. And we employers need to go on making our voices heard – speaking out for immigration reform to boost the nation's economic recovery.

IW USA president Tamar Jacoby can be reached for comment at 202-506-4541.

ImmigrationWorks USA is a national business federation advocating immigration policy that works for employers, workers and citizens. It 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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