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A good first step, but the next must be bipartisan

(Washington, April 30) – *Sens. Harry Reid, Dick Durbin, Charles Schumer, Dianne Feinstein and Robert Menendez held a press conference on Thursday to announce a Democratic proposal for immigration reform. ImmigrationWorks president Tamar Jacoby issued the following statement.*

No one has more of a stake in immigration reform than employers who rely on immigrant workers to keep their businesses open and contributing to the economy, and the small business owners in ImmigrationWorks' national network are pleased by any step that moves the country closer to reform. But we are also deeply concerned by a partisan push for an overhaul – a partisan effort to play politics with the issue could ultimately be worse than no movement at all.

On the substance, we are encouraged by the overall approach of the Democratic proposal. It includes all four essential elements of reform: more border security, more effective worksite enforcement, an answer for the unlawful immigrants already in the country and, most important, a program to allow needed workers to enter the U.S. legally in the future.

Taken as a whole, the Democrats' framework strikes us as 'tough but fair,' to borrow a phrase coined by Sens. Schumer and Lindsey Graham in the bipartisan proposal that paved the way for this partisan document – an essential balance for any immigration overhaul. And we believe this overall approach could provide the basis of a bipartisan push for reform when the time is right.

Some details of the Democratic proposal are more troubling. There's a reflexive animus for existing temporary worker programs that does not bode well for the new lesser-skilled worker-visa program the framework proposes to create. We're concerned about the language that holds contractors responsible for the actions of their subcontractors – that's just not realistic. And the section that's most important to employers who rely on immigrant workers – the section on future worker visas – needs fleshing out. We believe that any new visa program should allow employers, not the government, to choose which workers they need to man their businesses and allow the market, not a commission, to decide how many workers enter the country annually.

ImmigrationWorks looks forward to working with lawmakers on these and other critical provisions of a reform package.

The problems created by the broken system are urgent, and no one who believes we need to fix it wants to wait. But Congress will have only one opportunity in the next decade – and it won't get the answer right unless the effort is bipartisan.

IW USA president Tamar Jacoby available for comment at 202 506-4541.

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.