Cut in Temporary Worker Program Weaken Immigration Reform

As the business coalition concerned with the severe shortage of “essential workers” in the U.S., the Essential Worker Immigration Coalition (EWIC), we write to express our deep concern following the passage of the Bingaman amendment that was agreed to yesterday. This amendment guts the temporary worker program by reducing the number of visas available in any fiscal year from 400,000 to 200,000. It also removes the market-based cap that provided for an increase or decrease based upon economic demand.

We should build our new worker program around real economic and business needs. The cap should begin at 400,000 a year to keep up with demand. According to most estimates, about 500,000 undocumented immigrants come into the country each year, and our economy readily absorbs them. This new program should also be created with a market-based cap that increases or decreases based on the American economy’s needs. As noted security experts have pointed out, this program would also increase our border security by channeling workers through a legal, orderly process.

U.S. Commerce Secretary, Carlos Gutierrez, aptly summarized the reasons why the Bingaman amendment should be rejected:

“A robust temporary worker program is an essential component of border security, and I urge the Senate to reject the Bingaman amendment. One of the fundamental flaws of the 1986 legislation was its failure to provide a legal channel for the workers our economy needs to enter this country in an orderly way. A central component of the bipartisan agreement announced last week is a remedy to this problem through a robust temporary worker program, tough legal safeguards to protect the wages of U.S. workers and a flexible program cap that can adjust up or down to market needs over time, thereby taking pressure off the border. The Bingaman Amendment would eliminate this critical flexibility and cut the size of the temporary worker program in half. Congress has an opportunity to avoid the mistakes of the past and fashion comprehensive legislation that will secure our borders and meet the needs of our economy. I hope that Senators of both parties will oppose this amendment.”

The temporary worker program should be robust, accommodate the needs of the economy, and be workable. We hope that the Senate will review this crucial component of the temporary worker program and move to restore the visa numbers and the market based regulator when it returns from the Memorial Day recess.

The Essential Worker Immigration Coalition (EWIC) is a broad-based coalition of national businesses and trade associations from across the industry spectrum concerned with the shortage of both semi-skilled and unskilled (“essential worker”) labor. EWIC supports policies that facilitate the employment of essential workers by U.S. companies that are unable to find American workers (www.ewic.org). For further information, contact EWIC co-chairs Laura Reiff at (703) 749-1372, Randy Johnson at (202) 463-5448, John Gay at (202) 331-5912 or Craig Silvertooth at (202) 546-7584.