

*Press Release
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Business Coalition Applauds the Senate on the Passage of the Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2006 (S. 2611): A Necessary Step Towards Greater Economic and National Security

The Essential Worker Immigration Coalition (EWIC) applauds the Senate for passing the Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2006 (S. 2611). This bipartisan piece of legislation is the product of intense debate, great consideration and strong leadership by the Senate leadership. The legislative process was nothing short of a labor of love and the business community commends the dedication exhibited by Senators Specter, Kennedy, McCain, Hagel, Brownback, Graham, DeWine, Salazar and Martinez. EWIC also applauds the President for supporting comprehensive immigration reform and for directly addressing the nation on the need for such legislation.

In addressing the labor demands of the U.S. economy, this legislation also responds to the country's national security needs. "You can't secure our border with thousands trying to sneak in, and therefore, this country needs a temporary worker program that will allow foreign workers to enter our country legally on a temporary basis to meet the needs of our economy and take the pressure off our border," said President Bush in a speech Monday at the national convention of the National Restaurant Association, an EWIC member. The business community support the President statement and looks forward to working with Senate and House members during conference.

Though the legislation is not perfect, EWIC believes that it does provide a solid foundation by providing for a future flow program, increased border safety and national security measures, a pathway to legalization and an enhanced employment eligibility and verification system. EWIC looks forward to working with Senate and House members as well as the Administration during conference to ensure that the necessary modifications to strengthen the legislation are successfully made.

"The bipartisan compromise passed out of the Senate sets the stage to accomplish one of the most important and formidable domestic policy tasks. It deals with the most controversial and sensitive matters and provides a reasonable solution to the difficult issues relating to undocumented workers and the temporary worker program," said Laura Reiff, an immigration attorney at Greenberg Traurig and EWIC co-chair.

"This bill constitutes a sound bipartisan legislative blueprint which addresses both the security and economic needs of the country," said Randel Johnson, Chamber vice president of labor, immigration and employee benefits. "While some significant issues remain to be resolved, this legislation meets our major priorities and we are hopeful that our concerns can be resolved by House and Senate conferees," said Johnson.

"These objectives are not and should not be deemed mutually exclusive. It is for these reasons that EWIC supports a practical approach to comprehensive immigration reform that balances the U.S.'s economic interests with our national security; knowing who is presently residing in the U.S. and who enters the U.S. is in our national security interest," said EWIC co-chair John Gay, Senior Vice President for Government Affairs and Public Policy of the National Restaurant Association.

The Essential Worker Immigrant 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 more information, contact EWIC co-chairs John Gay at (202) 331-5912, Laura Reiff at (703) 749-1372 and/or Randy Johnson at (202) 463-5448.