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WASHINGTON DC – Although the Senate has temporarily suspended debate on immigration reform following a failed cloture vote this week, the American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA) strongly urges Congress to get it right and to pass a workable and comprehensive bill before the end of the year.

The implications of a failure to act have never been more urgent or clear. The status quo is completely untenable. If our immigration laws are not changed, people will continue to die in the desert in greater numbers, families will be torn asunder, workplace raids will continue, employers will be unable to find willing lawful workers, backlogs will grow, the proliferation of piecemeal state and local ordinances will continue, and immigrant communities will be faced with a literal state of siege in the land of the free.

The current immigration debate has offered an historic opportunity to enact real reform. The President calls for it, the American people support it, immigrants and employers need it, and Congress has been challenged to act. Our nation desperately needs visionary immigration laws that serve our economic and social needs in the 21st century.

The Senate bill that was just pulled from the floor was an earnest but fundamentally flawed attempt to address the multi-faceted problems created by our current immigration laws. The proposal went beyond last year's attempts to address the issue of undocumented migration and legal immigration backlogs and would have implemented a radically reengineered legal immigration system, which would abruptly end consideration of specific needs of employers and which would violate core family unity principles.

AILA renews its call for the Senate to fix the flaws in its bill, and to move the process forward to the House. AILA believes that final legislation must contain the following elements:

- A clear path to lawful permanent residence in the U.S. for the undocumented who work and contribute to our economic strength as a nation, without a meaningless and unworkable "touchback" requirement.
- A path to permanent status for new temporary workers. Creation of a large, churning pool of "guest workers" who cannot lay down roots in the U.S. would raise the specter of a new tide of immigrants lacking the infrastructure and opportunity to effectively assimilate into this country.
- Preservation and strengthening of our current employment-based immigration system, not wholesale replacement with a radical, untested "merit-based" point system that eliminates consideration of employers' needs and labor market protections for U.S. workers.
- Preservation of family-based immigration, a cornerstone of U.S. immigration ever since we abandoned race-based policies some 50 years ago.

- Adequate levels of “green cards” recalibrated to meet the demands of our economy at all ends of the skill spectrum.
- An increase in H-1B nonimmigrant numbers to meet documented labor needs.

“Congress and the President still have the historic opportunity to get immigration policy right once and for all. But to do this, they must avoid high-risk, large-scale social experimentation. The parts of our immigration system that work must be retained. The system cannot be untethered from its moorings to employer and family relationships, or we threaten to dissolve the social fabric that binds immigrant communities,” announced Carlina Tapia-Ruano, President of AILA.

AILA strongly supports the necessary and positive reforms that were included in the Senate bill and pledges to improve the workability of these programs if and when the legislative process moves on. Among the positive programs in the Senate bill are: (1) an opportunity for 12 million, hard-working undocumented people in this country to earn permanent residence; (2) significant reductions in the hopelessly backlogged family categories; (3) the DREAM Act; (4) the creation of a new program to provide for a flow of temporary workers to fill proven labor needs; (5) legal immigration backlog reduction provisions; and (6) AgJOBS.

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The American Immigration Lawyers Association is the national association of immigration lawyers established to promote justice, advocate for fair and reasonable immigration law and policy, advance the quality of immigration and nationality law and practice, and enhance the professional development of its members.