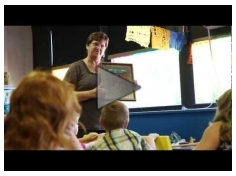

Christy McGill, Art Teacher - Divide Elementary School, Lookout, WV.

Joint Statement of Shared Principles by U.S. Chamber of Commerce President and CEO Thomas J. Donohue & AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka

February 21, 2013

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The United States will always be a nation of immigrants who have contributed greatly to the vitality, diversity, and creativity of American life. Yet, like the rest of America's immigration system, the mechanisms for evaluating our labor market needs and admitting foreign workers – as well as recruiting US workers – for temporary and permanent jobs are broken or non-existent. Current immigration policies are rigid, cumbersome and inefficient. What is needed is the creation of a professional bureau in a federal executive agency to inform Congress and the public about these issues together with a system that provides for lesser-skilled visas that respond to employers' needs while protecting the wages and working conditions of lesser-skilled workers – foreign or domestic. Current efforts at comprehensive immigration reform present a unique and historic opportunity for American workers and businesses to work together to fix this aspect of the badly broken system.

Over the last months, representatives of business and labor have been engaged in serious discussions about how to fix the system in a way that benefits both workers and employers, with a focus on lesser-skilled occupations. We have found common ground in several important areas, and have committed to continue to work together and with Members of Congress to enact legislation that will solve our current problems in a lasting manner.

Specifically, we agree that the following principles should guide legislation in the complicated and important area of addressing lesser-skilled immigration to our country:

First, American workers should have a first crack at available jobs. To that end, business and labor are committed to improving the way that information about job openings in lesser-skilled occupations reaches the maximum number of workers, particularly those in disadvantaged communities.

Second, there are instances – even during tough economic times – when employers are not able to fill job openings with American workers. Those instances will surely increase as the economy improves, and when they occur, it is important that our laws permit businesses to hire foreign workers without having to go through a cumbersome and inefficient process. Our challenge is to create a mechanism that responds to the needs of business in a market-driven way, while also fully protecting the wages and working conditions of U.S. and immigrant workers. Among other things, this requires a new kind of worker visa program that does not keep all workers in a permanent temporary status, provides labor mobility in a way that still gives American workers a first shot at available jobs, and that automatically adjusts as the American economy expands and contracts.

Third, we need to fix the system so that it is much more transparent, which requires that we build a base of knowledge using real-world data about labor markets and demographics. The power of today's technology enables us to use that knowledge to craft a workable demand-driven process fed by data that will inform how America addresses future labor shortages. We recognize that there is

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no simple solution to this issue. We agree that a professional bureau in a federal executive agency, with political independence analogous to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, should be established to inform Congress and the public about these issues.

We are now in the middle – not the end – of this process, and we pledge to continue to work together and with our allies and our representatives on Capitol Hill to finalize a solution that is in the interest of this country we all love.

Contact: Jeff Hauser/Gonzalo Salvador (202) 637-5018

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