

## ESSENTIAL WORKERS HELP OUR ECONOMY

### What are Essential Workers?

- **“Essential Workers”** are the unskilled and semi-skilled workers employed in all sectors of our economy. Essential workers include restaurant workers, retail clerks, construction trades people, manufacturing line workers, hotel service workers, food production workers, landscape workers, and health care aids. These individuals often work in the jobs that many Americans do not choose, but which are “essential” to keep our economy and our country growing.

### Aren't there enough U.S. workers for these jobs?

- **New jobs will increase dramatically by 2012, boosting the demand for Essential Workers.** Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) projections indicate that the U.S. will create 21.3 million new jobs by 2012. During this period, employment growth will be concentrated in the service-producing sector, with health services, leisure and hospitality, transportation and warehousing among the fastest growing sectors.
- **Unskilled and semi-skilled occupations have the highest projected growth rate.** The Department of Labor ranked the top 30 occupations with the largest projected job growth from 2002-2012. Of the occupations listed, 20 require only short-term or moderate-term on-the-job training.
- **As the baby boomers age demand increases for Essential Workers.** The aging population and increased life expectancies will increase the need for health services. The healthcare services industry is expected to add roughly 3.5 million jobs—1 out of every 6 new jobs created by 2012.
- **The U.S. is not producing enough new workers.** The Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that as the baby boomers retire, growth in the work force will slow to 0.4% per year. Barring unforeseen increases in immigration and/or participation rates among the elderly, there will be a reduction in the total size of the nation's workforce.
- **Employers are doing the “right” things.** Essential Worker employers have led the way in welfare-to-work, school-to-work and other initiatives that have been successful in reducing welfare rolls and getting graduates jobs, but these efforts still are insufficient. Employers are raising wages, offering improved benefits, signing bonuses and relocation pay.

### Isn't there already a visa category for essential workers that these employers can use?

- **Yes and No.** The H-2B temporary visa program is useful only for employers who can establish that their need for foreign workers is temporary (seasonal, a one-time occurrence, or a peak load or intermittent need). If the employer's need is year-round or does not fall into one of the definitions used by the Department of Labor or Immigration Service, the employer cannot use the H-2B visa to fill labor needs. A nonimmigrant visa category does not exist for employers who need workers for more than one year or for employers who have permanent or long-term jobs, for example in the health care, retail, hospitality and other industries. Even for employers with truly temporary needs, the H-2B category is fraught with bureaucratic red tape that makes it extremely time-consuming and difficult to use. The permanent immigrant category for non-professionals in occupations that require less than two years' experience is virtually useless; only 5,000 visas are available annually, and the backlog of waiting cases is typically over ten years long. As a result, employers often are forced to send their work overseas, cut back, or close their doors.

**With concerns about national security, is now the time to look at a temporary worker program?**

- **Yes.** A temporary worker program would help control immigration by legalizing the flow of people seeking to enter and leave this country. It would help satisfy the U.S. demand for workers and provide a legal and safe mechanism for workers to enter and leave the U.S. As Senator McCain articulated, “Immigration is a national security issue for all Americans and a matter of life and death for many living along our borders.”

**Is immigration a tool that can help strengthen our economy?**

- **Yes. Alan Greenspan, Chairman of the Federal Reserve Bank, and others have called upon Congress to reexamine our immigration policies as a means of maintaining a strong economy.** In Congressional testimony, Mr. Greenspan demonstrated the link between alleviating inflationary pressures caused by a tight labor market and stated that tight labor markets could be the greatest threat to our economy, as they promote inflation. He stated that Congress should look at the contributions that immigrant workers can make to help reduce the chance of inflation and help our economy.

**What needs to be done?**

**Congress and the Administration need to commit to passing bipartisan comprehensive immigration reform that would match willing workers with willing employers.**

- In early 2004 and again in January 2005, President Bush spoke forcefully about the need to reform our immigration laws and articulated several principles to guide such reform. The President’s comments have ignited the debate on reform. The United States needs a regulated, workable immigration system that allows foreign nationals to work here when there is evidence of a shortage of available U.S. workers, that allows those individuals already here and working to obtain legal status and work authorization and reduces the backlogs allowing the families of workers in the U.S. to reunite. Such initiatives must receive adequate funding in order to succeed and reduce the long visa processing backlogs that make current programs difficult to use.