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U.S. Chamber of Commerce

February 27, 2008

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Madam Speaker:

Compete America, a coalition of corporations, educators, research institutions and trade associations, wishes to thank the leadership of both parties for the strong recognition you have expressed that the United States Congress must reform its programs for high-skilled immigration if we are to remain a world economic and innovation leader. Under the Speaker's leadership, the House Democrats' Innovation Agenda highlighted the need to "[e]nsure, as part of bipartisan and comprehensive immigration reform, that the best and brightest in the United States and around the world are able to contribute to innovation here." House Republican leaders have emphasized this same point, noting in an October 2007 letter to the Speaker that "[w]e must enact legislation that allows U.S. companies to attract and retain high-skilled workers to contribute and excel in the U.S. economy without unnecessary delays and waiting periods. Members on both sides of the aisle have supported this in the past and we're confident they will again." The need is clear; the support strong and bipartisan.

We agree absolutely with these points and therefore write to voice our strong support for a bipartisan package of reforms that responds to the critical needs of our economy and society. We are very concerned about the potential for Congress to consider an enforcement-only immigration bill.

We certainly agree that enforcement measures are a crucial part of immigration reform. Enforcement-only legislation, however, would not address many of the most pressing aspects of the national crisis surrounding our immigration system, especially for U.S. employers who need access to highly-skilled professionals in order to remain competitive. Congress instead must address immigration reform more thoroughly, including reforms to the legal immigration system, whose H-1B visa and employment-based (EB) green card programs are woefully inadequate to meet our nation's economic needs.

Any immigration legislation that Congress considers this year must, among other reforms, respond to the immediate need for improved access to highly-skilled foreign professional talent, to ensure the United States maintains its competitive advantage and continues to be the world's leader in innovation. We must ensure that access to highly skilled immigrants is aligned to market demands, and we must address processing delays and backlogs that harm the American economy. Today's arbitrary and unrealistic limits on H-1B visas and employment-based green cards sends the message that America's doors are closed and that these highly-skilled individuals, many of whom have been educated in U.S.

universities, should look for opportunity elsewhere. In just a few short weeks, for example, the U.S. government will begin to accept applications for H-1B visas for Fiscal Year 2009. As was the case last year, not only is the annual supply of H-1B visas virtually assured to be exhausted *on the very first day applications are accepted, half of those applying will lose out in the visa lottery*, denying U.S. employers access to tens of thousands of highly skilled and badly needed professionals who could contribute to economic growth and job creation in this country.

Certainly, enforcement measures should be considered as part of a broader, bipartisan package, but we urge Congress to consider closely the effectiveness of these proposals. For example, provisions in the Secure America through Verification and Enforcement Act (the SAVE Act, H.R. 4088) raise very important concerns. Specifically, title II of the SAVE Act would rest workforce verification reform on the nationwide expansion – on far too accelerated a schedule – of a now-voluntary government electronic verification program that does not come close to the scale, accuracy, or safeguards that would be needed for a successful national program.

In summary, we are very concerned about the potential for Congress to consider an enforcement-only immigration bill and instead urge the House to consider a package of urgent reforms that will help the U.S. remain the world leader in innovation and serve our economic, national security and other core national interests.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert Hoffman", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Robert Hoffman
Co-Chair, Compete America