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**Remarks on Immigration**

*As Prepared for Delivery*

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Thank you all so much for inviting me to be with you today. Special thanks to Roger for that kind introduction.

I can't tell you how pleased we are in the White House that you've gathered for a constructive dialogue on immigration. This is an issue that is integral to who we are – and how we're perceived -- as Americans, and it's critical to how we will chart our economic future while reasserting ourselves as both a nation of laws and a nation of immigrants.

We all know the debate over immigration reform in recent years has been contentious. But heated debates aren't an excuse for inaction. We know that Republicans and Democrats can all agree that the immigration system is badly broken. It simply doesn't work. The status quo is unsustainable, whether we look at it from an economic perspective or as a matter of our national security. That's why President Obama is fiercely determined to stop kicking the can down the road and fix the broken system once and for all.

This starts by finding common ground. No one would argue that it is unacceptable to have eleven million people in America illegally – living and working in the shadows, often exploited by unscrupulous employers, unable to contribute fully to the communities they live in, and even unwilling to interact with the law enforcement officers we rely on to keep our communities safe. As the President has said, we have to be honest about the problem, and we have to move past the false debates that divide the country rather than bring it together. For too long the debate over immigration has been dominated by those who on the one hand argue passionately for a mass amnesty or even that we should ignore the laws on the books, and those on the other side who argue we should round up all eleven million people and hold mass deportations. Neither of those two options are where the majority of Americans stand.

The American people are compassionate and practical. They recognize most immigrants are hardworking and have good intentions, but they understand that an indiscriminate approach that doesn't hold people accountable would be unwise and unfair. It would suggest to others who are considering coming here illegally that there would be no repercussions, while sending the wrong message to all those waiting in line to come here legally. At the same time, the American people understand that it is not possible to round up and deport 11 million people. Not only would it be wildly expensive, it would go against who we are as a nation, and it would take a tremendous toll on our country's economy at a time when we need to focus on economic recovery. What the American people agree on is that every side has to be held accountable.

Common-sense comprehensive immigration reform has to be grounded in the principles of accountability and responsibility. Responsibility from the federal government to secure our borders and provide a system that works so that employers can rely on a legal workforce. Responsibility from employers, so that unscrupulous companies don't exploit undocumented

workers and gain an unfair advantage over those who follow the rules. And responsibility from those who are here illegally, so that they register, admit to having broken the law, pay a fine, pay back taxes, get right with the law, and learn English, before they can get on a path toward citizenship.

Since President Obama walked into the White House, we've taken the federal government's immigration responsibilities seriously. We've taking steps to make our enforcement system smarter and more effective, while making our detention system more humane, providing more resources to the immigration courts, and encouraging naturalization of immigrants including many in the military, as well as integration of legal immigrants into their communities.

We have dedicated an unprecedented amount of resources to the border. Today, there are more boots on the ground near the Southwest border than at any time in our history. And as a result, we're seizing more illegal guns, cash and drugs than in years past. Contrary to some of the rhetoric that you hear, statistics show that crime along the border is down. And statistics collected by Customs and Border Protection reflect a significant reduction in the number of people trying to cross the border illegally.

This Administration has also stepped up enforcement against the worst workplace offenders. Since January 2009, DHS has audited more than 2,785 employers suspected of hiring illegal labor – compared to 500 audits in all of 2008 – and has debarred more than 100 companies and 80 individuals and issued more than \$6.4 million in fines. And we're improving E-Verify, a system that gives employers a more reliable way to verify that their employees are here legally.

We have more to do, but in the end, the only way to truly fix our broken immigration system is through comprehensive reform. Only a 360 degree retooling of our immigration system will address our security needs and - as this conversation today considered - strengthen our economy for the long term.

So let me take a moment to expand on that. A steady stream of hardworking and talented immigrants has resulted in America having a younger workforce, -- and a faster-growing economy – than many of our competitors. In an increasingly interconnected world, immigrants have given us a powerful advantage in global competition. Simultaneously, you have the innovation and creativity of immigrants who are drawn to our shores to get a world class education, only to find themselves pushed away when they graduate. Those are immigrants who start businesses, who break new ground and create new industries. Our economy needs both.

So immigration reform just makes good economic sense.

- First, it will encourage those high-skilled immigrants to move to and stay in the United States. These immigrants help create demand for new goods and services which employ thousands of American workers and help to make our economy more dynamic and efficient.

- Second, reform will ensure that workers who are here illegally fully pay their share of taxes. According to the Congressional Budget Office, the bill that the Senate considered in 2006 would have increased both tax revenues and social spending – BUT tax revenues would have outpaced spending. Taxes paid by immigrants could be an important part of government revenue in the coming years, and could help to address some of the current fiscal challenges we face. Let’s not forget, in large part due to our foreign born population, today the U.S. has relatively more workers per retiree than most of our major trading partners.

Bringing this significant part of our workforce out of the shadows of our economy will also help avoid a “race to the bottom” where unscrupulous employers undercut legal protections for their workers and allow undocumented immigrants to get in a long line to become citizens. No longer will illegal immigrants be targeted by employers who choose to abuse the law for bigger profits on the back of cheap labor.

- Third, from a security perspective, as immigrants who are here illegally register and undergo background checks, our law enforcement officials will be able to focus much more closely on those who don’t, and potentially pose the greatest threat.
- And finally, by increasing border security, improving technology for verification of legal status, and imposing stiffer penalties on employers who hire immigrants illegally, reform will help prevent a repeat situation where we have millions of immigrants living illegally in our country again.

That’s common sense reform. Just four short years ago a majority of Democrats and 11 of the Republicans who are still in the Senate today voted together to move forward on that type of reform. It’s the type of legislation we need now, and we can make it happen if we move past the false debates and start focusing on the long term economic interests of our nation.

Ignoring these challenges may be good for the next election, but they don’t help us build long-term prosperity. That’s why the President instructed his team in the White House and his Cabinet to work to pass comprehensive immigration reform. The President’s Cabinet and White House officials have worked on this for more than a year and a half, in constant communication with key stakeholders around the country and key members of Congress from both parties. We provided technical assistance for months to Senators Schumer and Graham, a Democrat and a Republican, to get a bill written. The President supports the bipartisan framework Senators Schumer and Graham presented, and was pleased when Senate Democrats developed an outline of a bill along those same lines. But today, at this point, despite Senate Republicans’ refusal to step up, as they have done in the past, to pass comprehensive and accountable immigration reform, he’s as committed as he’s ever been, He wants to get it done.

We were pleased when it appeared the Senate might debate and pass the DREAM Act, and made our support known through letters of support from several members of the Cabinet and engagement by the President. We think it’s limited, but important, common sense reform, that also serves our economy well.

As you know, the DREAM Act provides relief for kids who were brought to the U.S. when they were 15 or younger, have lived in the U.S. for at least five years, have good moral character, and plan to attend college or serve in the military for two years.

It just makes sense to allow young people who've spent most of their lives here -- and want to continue to contribute to the vibrancy and security of our nation -- to earn legal status. In fact, it makes so much sense that a dozen members of the Senate's Republican Caucus were once co-sponsors of this legislation with 7 voting to allow its consideration by the full Senate in 2007.

That's why we were disappointed when a majority of the Senate was prepared to debate the DREAM Act but a minority prevented us from crossing a 60-vote threshold to get there. But, this setback isn't the end. Senator Durbin has reintroduced the DREAM Act, and we'll also be working closely with Senator Menendez -- who plans to introduce a comprehensive immigration bill soon -- as well as others who are leaders on this issue in the Senate.

The time has come and long passed for comprehensive immigration reform. It's time to restore accountability and responsibility to a broken system. Simply saying no just isn't an option for our security or our economy.

Thank you for being here today and welcoming me to this conversation. I look forward to continuing to partner with you so that we can lead our nation toward a strong and prosperous economy built on top of an immigration system that works.

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