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**Statement of Change to Win Chair Anna Burger on the Immigration Reform Bill
Approved by the Senate Judiciary Committee**

“The Senate Judiciary Committee took a historic step by approving a comprehensive immigration reform measure that if enacted will allow millions of hard-working immigrants to come out of the shadows and fully participate in the American Dream. The bill recognizes that immigrants are an integral part of the American workforce, and that these workers deserve the same rights and protections U.S. workers enjoy.

“The power of one million workers and family members marching in the streets in the last week helped make this bill possible. Now it is time for people of all political parties, races and income levels to come together around a real solution to our immigration problem, rather than continue to engage in demagoguery and promote divisiveness.

“Senators Specter and Kennedy, and other committee members including Sens. Brownback, DeWine, Durbin, Feinstein, Graham and Leahy deserve the utmost praise for leading the charge against the draconian enforcement-only approach of Senate Majority Leader Frist and the House of Representatives.

“This is a truly bipartisan measure that provides a comprehensive approach to immigration reform. That is the only way to tackle this complex issue and to ensure justice and fairness for U.S. workers and immigrant workers alike.

“The Judiciary Committee bill will improve our national security by strengthening our borders with more personnel and more advanced technology to prevent illegal immigration. We should not squander our enforcement resources arresting and detaining dishwashers, janitors, farmworkers, and nursing home or construction workers.

“Giving 11 million undocumented immigrants an earned path to citizenship is the right thing to do as they perform essential jobs that benefit all Americans, pay their share of taxes, and contribute greatly to our communities. Family unity is a cherished American value, and the legislation strives for that by eliminating the family backlog and allowing family members waiting up to 14 years to reunite.

“The legislation takes steps towards stopping exploitation by employers, while requiring workers to pay fines and back taxes, undergo background checks and go to the back of the line to gain permanent status and get on a path to citizenship. During this waiting period, which will take many years, those individuals will be able to work legally. Make no mistake about it; this is not an amnesty bill.

“Unfortunately, the Judiciary Committee bill is still in need of critical improvements when it comes to the Senate floor. We believe that the shape, size and ground rules for any new immigrant worker program must not contribute to the creation of a second-class group of workers.

“The Change to Win unions will work with our bipartisan Senate allies to see that worker protection improvements are made to ensure that all employees are treated fairly and have the same legal protections, regardless of their immigration status. Employers seeking to bring in new immigrant workers must be held to high standards of labor certifications. Employers seeking such workers must prove to the U.S. Department of Labor and to the State Workforce Agencies that there is an absence of willing U.S. workers. Employers must pay fair wages and provide safe working conditions and whistleblower protections for all workers, both U.S. native and immigrant.

“We thank Sen. Dianne Feinstein for leading the effort to secure justice for farmworkers. Her proposal that was adopted will allow hundreds of thousands of immigrants who work our fields and harvest our crops to earn legal status and a path to citizenship for them and their families and improve their wages and working conditions.

“We are troubled that Sen. Frist is planning to put his partisan, enforcement-only bill on the Senate floor rather than unite behind this good bipartisan committee measure. Only a comprehensive reform proposal can become law. Legislation must: improve security, ensure workers are treated fairly and are free from exploitation, eliminate the family backlog, and be workable so that the millions of undocumented individuals living within our borders are able to come out of the shadows and earn a path to citizenship.”

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