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*** For Immediate Release***

December 15, 2009

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Gutierrez Remarks Upon Introduction of the Comprehensive Immigration Reform for America's Security and Prosperity Act of 2009

(Washington D.C.) Today, members of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus (CHC) joined with more than 90 House Democrats to introduce the Comprehensive Immigration Reform for America's Security And Prosperity (CIR ASAP) Act of 2009, legislation that secures our nation's economy, keeps families together and secures our borders while fixing our broken immigration system.

Rep. Luis V. Gutierrez, chair of the CHC Immigration Task Force made the following remarks at a press conference introducing the bill:

"Many people are responsible for this legislation today. I thank you all for your work.

I want to particularly thank the Congressional Hispanic Caucus. We stand together today as cosponsors of this comprehensive immigration bill. I'm proud to be a member of a caucus that is leading the fight for real immigration reform.

In the immigration debate, some things are constant. They never change.

One is that opponents of immigration reform will use it as a wedge issue and will blame everything from unemployment to rising health care costs on immigrants.

Of course, why stop with jobs or health care. Global warming? Rough stock Market? Bad traffic? Lousy weather?

Too many immigrants.

Your favorite lost on Dancing with the Stars? Let's blame immigrants for that one, too.

The immigrant blame game is constant. Cynical politicians believe it drives poll numbers, cynical commentators believe it drives TV ratings. The immigrant blame game is one of the most predictable, and most deplorable, elements of public debate in our nation.

But something else has been predictable, and constant, and honorable.

That is the way that our nation's immigrants have responded to the immigrant blame game.

In Congress, we've responded year after year with legislation, often bipartisan. While many immigrant opponents would never even come to the table to craft a workable solution to our urgent crisis, we've sat patiently at that table, often making concessions, often suggesting compromise.

In the public debate, while commentators and critics have targeted immigrants with blame and bullying, our nation's immigrants have simply kept on working, kept on contributing, and kept on hoping for a solution.

They've marched – hundreds of thousands strong in peaceful unity asking for fairness.

They've attended community meetings. Last summer, I hosted a family unity tour where mothers and fathers and daughters and sons expressed one simple hope – for a fair immigration policy that would stop tearing families apart.

Together: labor leaders and teachers, community organizers and clergy, grape pickers and bricklayers, nurses and janitors. Together immigrants rose above the immigrant blame game with patience and tolerance and dignity.

In fact, we all have learned something from our religious leaders, who have reminded us of these words from the good book:

“You have heard it said, ‘An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth’; but I say unto you, whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.”

Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.

I believe our immigrant community has turned so many cheeks that our heads are spinning like tops.

I'm not complaining. I say it with pride.

Because it's easy to be angry and frustrated. But still, we've turned the other cheek.

We've stayed at the table, and negotiated, and compromised.

And the patience, and the tolerance, and the dignity of our immigrant community has brought us to this moment -- to this bill, to this final push for comprehensive reform.

You have detailed summaries of this comprehensive bill – I want to give you a simple summary of it:

This bill should be our nation's immigration policy.

This bill is not complicated. What we need to do – right now -- is not complicated. Our nation's immigration policy should be pro-family, pro-jobs and pro-security.

Family, jobs and security. This bill accomplishes all three.

It keeps families together, but understands we must secure our borders. It keeps people working, but understands the needs of our economy. It gives a pathway to citizenship, but understands that immigrants must learn English, pay taxes and contribute to their communities.

It's pro-family, pro-jobs and pro-security. And the time to pass it into law is right now.

We've waited long enough. Just because we turn our cheek, doesn't mean we should turn away from what's right.

Just because we've been patient, doesn't mean we can wait forever.

Gandhi was a man who knew something about patience. About turning the other cheek. He said, "All compromise is based on give and take, but there can be no give and take on fundamentals. Any compromise on mere fundamentals is a surrender. For it is all give and no take."

We have given. And we have waited. And we have compromised. But there are some fundamentals that simply cannot be negotiated away and cannot be waited for one minute longer:

The ability of a mother to stay with her son. For an honest person to work hard. For all families in our country to be safe.

Our families. Our jobs. Our security.

Three simple principles. Three American principles. Not just for immigrants, but for all of us. Every American will benefit from this bill, from the heightened national security, from the commitment to family unity, from the common-sense approach to jobs and our economy.

Every American will benefit from putting an end to the immigrant blame game.

As a candidate for President, Barack Obama said:

"We need immigration reform that will secure our borders, and punish employers who exploit immigrant labor; reform that finally brings the 12 million people who are here illegally out of the shadows by requiring them to take steps to become legal citizens. We

must assert our values and reconcile our principles as a nation of immigrants and a nation of laws. That is a priority I will pursue from my very first day.”

I take my friend the President at his word. I agree with him. He’s right. We have waited a year, the time for action is now.

The immigrant blame game wants us to forget that immigrants are just people. Not statistics. Not anonymous. Not perfect. Not evil. Just people trying to do their best.

But immigrants are different in one important way. They desperately want something that far too many of us take for granted. They want to be Americans.

This bill is the right way to allow these people to reach their dreams. We’ve waited too long. Now, with this bill, let’s end the blame game and turn our immigrants -- into Americans.”

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