August 3, 2009

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Chairman
Immigration, Refugees and
Border Security Subcommittee
Committee on the Judiciary
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510
FAX: 202.228.0464

The Honorable John Cornyn
Ranking Member
Immigration, Refugees and
Border Security Subcommittee
Committee on the Judiciary
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510
FAX: 202.228.0464

Dear Chairman Schumer and Ranking Member Cornyn;

Following his meeting with congressional leaders on June 25, President Barack Obama declared that “one of the most critical issues that this nation faces … is an immigration system that is broken and needs fixing… My administration is fully behind an effort to achieve comprehensive immigration reform.”

As Congress takes up the president’s challenge, we urge you to include our organizations’ recommendations on high-skill immigration reform for employment-based permanent resident visas (green cards). This position is based on a consensus that the Semiconductor Industry Association (SIA) and the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers – United States of America (IEEE-USA) first advanced in October 2007. At that time, comprehensive reform had failed in the Senate and media stories focused on our organizations’ different positions on the H-1B temporary work visa program. SIA and IEEE-USA believed – and continue to believe -- that it is more important for parties with different viewpoints on some issues to try to work on reform proposals that both could support. Our organizations continue to share a consensus on employment-based permanent visa reforms.

Electrical and electronics engineers design the complex circuits that are embedded in silicon chips, and make up about half of the semiconductor industry’s engineering workforce. The success of the $120 billion U.S. semiconductor industry – America’s second leading export -- rests on the efforts of its electrical and electronics engineers to develop innovative products that are better than the competition’s.

Nearly half of master’s and 70 percent of Ph.D. graduates in electrical and electronic engineering from U.S. universities are foreign nationals. These highly talented individuals should be able to get permanent resident status in an expedited manner, rather than having to wait 5-10 years as many do under the current system. Semiconductor companies recognize the very considerable potential for these
individuals to contribute long-term to our industry and the U.S. economy. It’s for this reason that SIA’s member companies sponsor 97 percent of our H-1B hires for permanent resident status.

SIA and IEEE-USA support reforms that will enable more highly skilled professionals from around the world to enter and remain in the United States as legal permanent residents to help create new technologies, businesses and jobs. Other nations are working hard to attract this same talent in order to compete against U.S. companies. We specifically recommend the following:

- Allow foreign nationals who graduate with advanced degrees in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) from U.S. educational institutions to more easily advance from temporary student status to legal permanent resident status and exempt them from the limits on employment-based immigrant admissions

- Reduce visa backlogs of permanent employment-based admissions for applicants who are currently legally living and working in the United States by recapturing unused EB visas from prior years

- Reform current permanent employment-based admissions ceilings by a) exempting dependents (spouses and minor children) of employment-based principals from current limits on permanent employment-based admissions, and b) relaxing per country limits on permanent employment-based admissions

These immigration reforms should be viewed as part of a broader competitiveness and innovation initiative that includes a doubling of federal investment in research in the physical sciences; improvements in STEM education at the K-12 and undergraduate levels; and enactment of tax reforms that encourage investment in the United States such as a permanent and strengthened R&D tax credit.

We urge you to take up the president’s challenge and to include recommendations backed by SIA and IEEE-USA as part of comprehensive immigration reform legislation in the 111th Congress.

Best regards,

George Scalise
President
Semiconductor Industry Association

Gordon W. Day, Ph.D.
President
IEEE-USA
August 3, 2009

The Honorable Zoe Lofgren
Chairwoman
Immigration, Citizenship, Refugees, Border Security, and International Law
Subcommittee
Committee on the Judiciary
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515
FAX: 202.225.3737

The Honorable Steve King
Ranking Member
Immigration, Citizenship, Refugees, Border Security, and International Law
Subcommittee
Committee on the Judiciary
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515
FAX: 202.225.3737

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