March 31, 2011

The Honorable Lamar Smith  
Chairman  
Committee on the Judiciary  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John Conyers, Jr.  
Ranking Member  
Committee on the Judiciary  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Elton Gallegly  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Immigration Policy and Enforcement  
Committee on the Judiciary  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Zoe Lofgren  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Immigration Policy and Enforcement  
Committee on the Judiciary  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Conyers, Chairman Gallegly and Ranking Member Lofgren:

The Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers – USA (IEEE-USA) and the Semiconductor Industry Association (SIA) appreciate the committee’s recent focus on legal immigration reform, including the H1-B temporary work visa program. As you may know, SIA and IEEE-USA have for some time been at odds over portions of the H-1B program and its administration. However, despite the difficult political issues surrounding changes to immigration policy, we have been working together over the last several years to craft a common understanding on high-skilled immigration reform that emphasizes permanent admissions and the need for immediate efforts to retain highly skilled graduates with advanced degrees from America’s top science and engineering programs.

Media coverage of this issue had often highlighted our two organizations different positions on the H-1B program, and overlooked the reform proposals we both support. IEEE-USA and SIA see the permanent retention of highly educated immigrants as part of a broader effort to increase America’s competitiveness and create new jobs here at home.

Electrical and electronics engineers design the complex circuits that are embodied in silicon chips, and represent about half of the semiconductor industry’s engineering workforce. The success of the $145 billion U.S. semiconductor industry – America’s leading manufacturing export -- rests on the efforts of its electrical and electronics engineers to develop innovative products that are better than the competition both here and abroad.

Currently 50 percent 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 (green cards) in an expedited manner, rather than having to wait from 5-10 years as many do under the current system. These delays and other pendant problems allow our overseas competitors to recruit talented individuals who simply won’t subject their families and careers to an extended and uncertain limbo. For the very top prospects, why would they do otherwise?

SIA and IEEE-USA support immediate action by the Congress to retain these graduates as legal permanent residents. **At a time when job creation is the nation’s top priority, the United States must act now to encourage these highly skilled individuals to remain here to create new companies, new products, new technologies, and most importantly, new jobs.** If we fail to act now, we will lose yet another class of talented innovators and the economic benefits of their brilliant work will go elsewhere.

The conversation you begin today with this hearing should start a movement to quickly enact legislation that will allow the United States to welcome this talent permanently into our workforce and nation. Hopefully our own coalition suggests a path for Congress to move quickly to fix this problem.

Very Respectfully,

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