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“Immigration and Its Contribution to Our Economic Strength”

Opening Statement of Senator Amy Klobuchar, Vice Chair of the Joint Economic Committee

As Prepared for Delivery

Good morning. I'd like to thank everyone for being here today for this important and timely conversation about immigration. I'd especially like to thank our distinguished panel of witnesses, who I will introduce shortly.

Today's hearing comes at a critical moment. Our economy is improving, the private sector is adding jobs, and the housing market is getting stronger. But more needs to be done, and comprehensive immigration reform is key to moving our economy forward. That is why I have scheduled this two-part hearing to discuss immigration's contribution to our economic strength.

We all agree that our current immigration system is broken, and that we'll need to work together in a bipartisan manner to get comprehensive reform done. As a member of the Senate Judiciary Committee, I will be there later this week as we start marking up immigration reform legislation.

There is a large and diverse coalition supporting immigration reform, including business leaders, law enforcement, religious leaders, farmers, labor unions, and people from across the political spectrum. We can in fact see the stretch of the ideological left to the right support for this bill right here at this table. I'd like to introduce our witnesses now.

Dr. Adriana Kugler is a Professor at the Georgetown Public Policy Institute and is Co-Director of the International Summer Institute on Policy Evaluation. She served as Chief Economist of the U.S. Department of Labor in 2011 and 2012. She is a Research Associate at the National Bureau of Economic Research.

Mr. Grover Norquist is the President of Americans for Tax Reform, an organization which he founded in 1985 that works to limit the size and cost of government. Previously, Mr. Norquist served as Economist and Chief Speechwriter at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and as Executive Director of

the National Taxpayers' Union.

I don't know how many times a Democratic Senator has asked Grover Norquist to testify, but I did. We will chalk it up to the strong bipartisan support for this bill.

It's not going to be easy or simple, but this reform is vital to our country. We need to establish a reasonable pathway to citizenship, continue the progress we've made on the border, and make sure our companies are getting the workers they need to compete in the world market.

Immigrants are an entrepreneurial force in America. Look at the Fortune 500 companies. Ninety of those companies were founded by immigrants, and more than 200 were founded by immigrants or their children – including Hormel and 3M in my state. Thirty percent of all U.S. Nobel Prize winners have been immigrants.

I also want to focus this morning on some aspects of comprehensive immigration reform that are very important to moving our economy forward, such as important provisions for ag workers and a pathway to citizenship.

I-squared

Earlier this year I co-sponsored Senator Hatch's legislation, the I-squared Bill, which is about encouraging engineers and inventors and entrepreneurs to work here in this country. I-squared reforms the H-1B visa system to meet the needs of a growing science, engineering and medical community.

I-squared would also reform the student green card system to encourage students who get degrees here to stay here, rather than going overseas to compete against American businesses. The bill would also improve the green card system and change the visa funding structure to improve science, engineering, technology and math education.

I am pleased that the legislation includes provisions very similar to I-squared.

Conrad 30

Second, comprehensive immigration reform can contribute to economic strength by allowing doctors to stay in the U.S. to practice medicine, rather than returning to their home country for two years after their residency has ended. We have medically under-served areas of our country – from rural America to inner cities. As just one example, Grand Meadow, Minnesota, lost its local health clinic because they could not find a doctor to staff it.

I sponsored legislation expanding on the former Conrad State 30 Physician Access Act that would allow doctors to stay in the US without having to return home if they practice in an underserved area for three years. Access to quality health care helps businesses attract the employees they need to grow and compete. The Gang of Eight legislation includes the Conrad State 30 provisions.

Tourism

Immigration reform is critical to another important part of our economy in Minnesota and across the country: tourism. Last year, a bipartisan group of Senators including myself introduced a bill, the JOLT Act, to modernize and expand the Visa Waiver Program and reduce visa wait times.

Tourism suffered a 16 percent decline after 9/11. Every one percent increase in travel spending directly generates 76,700 American jobs. We have seen significant improvements in the tourism industry, which has recovered nearly 60 percent of the jobs lost since 9/11. The tourism industry now supports 7.7 million jobs in the United States.

These are jobs that, like the jobs at our airports, depend on leisure and business travelers from around the world. The immigration reform bill in the Senate includes the JOLT Act, which is a positive step for tourism.

One last point: We know that immigration reform not only benefits our economy in the short term, but it will strengthen our economic foundation for the long term by helping address our national debt.

Former CBO Director Douglas Holtz-Eakin estimates that immigration reform will save \$2.7 trillion over 10 years by adding to our labor force, boosting productivity and accelerating economic growth, something we will hear more about from our witness Grover Norquist today, who knows a little bit about the debt.

America must be a country that makes stuff again, that invents things, that exports to the world, and to do that we need the world's talent.

I look forward to our discussion as we dig into the economic impact of immigration. And again, I want to thank our witnesses for being here today.

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