

For Immediate Release
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**As President visits, Nebraskans can be proud of state's leadership in
welcoming and integrating new immigrants**

Lincoln, NE - The following is a statement by Milo Mumgaard, Executive Director of Nebraska Appleseed Center for Law in the Public Interest

As we prepare for President Bush's visit to Nebraska later this week to talk about immigration reform, Nebraskans can be proud of the leadership our state has shown in welcoming and integrating new immigrants. This leadership is evident at many levels: Senator Hagel's consistent support of principled and comprehensive immigration reform, our state legislature's rational public policy responses to the latest wave of immigration, and strong community support from the many towns around the state where new and established families are working together to revitalize local economies and bring new energy to rural communities.

President Bush and Senator Hagel are in favor of a simple principle - a path to citizenship for immigrants who are working, paying taxes, and contributing in so many other ways to our communities and country. This is a concept that Nebraskans favor because it reflects our Midwestern values. Many of Nebraska's elected officials, at both the state and federal level, have demonstrated a level-headed, rational approach to public policies on these issues - a farsighted attitude that benefits all Nebraskans - rather than an unthinking backlash response. Thanks to the leadership of Senator Hagel, the newly passed Senate immigration bill includes some pathways to citizenship and begins to offer some real solutions to our country's broken immigration system. The Senate bill is a far cry from the knee-jerk, draconian - and ineffective - provisions of the House immigration bill passed in December.

At the state level, our Nebraska legislature has not even considered, much less passed, anti-immigrant legislation such as that we've seen in Georgia. Instead, the Unicameral has passed laws to promote the productive integration of newcomers, such as the recent in-state tuition bill that allows undocumented students who have graduated from Nebraska high schools to pay college tuition at the same rates as other Nebraska high school graduates. This is a policy that says to these bright new leaders, we know your future is right here, and as a state it is in our best interest that you have the chance to fully pursue it.

This positive approach recognizes the great opportunity represented by and the enormous contributions made by new immigrants to the state and the nation.

The peaceful immigration marches attended by more than 25,000 people around the state in April and May were an inspiring symbol of the democratic tradition that new Nebraskans so clearly understand and seek to be a part of. Nebraskans know this is something to be embraced and encouraged - whether in local neighborhoods or at the Unicameral.

In Nebraska, we support comprehensive immigration reform and public policies that integrate our newest neighbors because we know it is simply an approach that makes the most sense. Our immigrant history, past and present, is a great strength, and this is merely the latest chapter in the classic American story.

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