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New Coalition of Conservative Evangelical Leaders Calls for Comprehensive Immigration Reform Now

WASHINGTON, DC – A diverse group of influential conservative evangelical leaders announced their support today for immediate action by Congress towards comprehensive immigration reform. Speaking at a press conference on Capitol Hill hosted by The Reform Institute and We Care America, the leaders articulated the evangelical case for a compassionate and practical immigration policy that stresses security and takes into account the contributions and innocent intentions of the vast majority of immigrants.

Concerned Christian leaders have formed the Hispanic Advancement Coalition to advocate a development agenda for New Americans that includes education, language proficiency, civics, and economic independence. Comprehensive immigration reform is at the top of their agenda.

Other prominent evangelicals, such as Dr. Derrick Harkins, Pastor of the Nineteenth Street Baptist Church in Washington, joined Hispanic leaders such as Latin Grammy Award-winning singer and pastor Marcos Witt, and Noel Castellanos, Executive Director of the Christian Community Development Association, at the press conference. The group also met with key members of Congress. The group is heartened by bipartisan efforts in Congress towards comprehensive immigration reform espoused by Senator John McCain (R-AZ) and Senator Edward Kennedy (D-MA).

The basic Christian principles of mercy and respect for others shape the views of this coalition. “The overwhelming majority of immigrants crossing the border do not seek to harm this country. They seek hope. They seek opportunity. They seek to provide for their families through hard work. They contribute economically to this country by doing jobs that others will not do,” stated Rev. Sam Rodriguez, President of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference, a sister organization of the National Association of Evangelicals. “They live and work in the shadows of our society. It is our moral responsibility to protect these people from the abuse and exploitation that many are subjected to under our broken immigration system.”

The coalition believes that comprehensive reform, which provides legal avenues for workers and their families to enter and work in our country in addition to enforcement, is the most effective and just way to protect our borders. “We do not support amnesty,” said Dr. Juan Hernandez, Senior Fellow at The Reform Institute, frequent network news commentator, and author of *The New America Pioneers*. “Comprehensive immigration reform is an acknowledgement that our failed immigration policy has

created a de facto system that punishes those who try to enter our country legally and that it is not feasible or fair to round up and deport the 11 million immigrants who are undocumented.”

The coalition supports a system that secures our borders, establishes a temporary worker program and allows for undocumented workers to stay and work in this country legally and work their way towards legal permanent status by submitting to background checks, paying substantial fines, learning English, paying back taxes, maintaining steady employment, and going to the back of the line in applying for permanent status. Added Dr. Hernandez, “This is not about rewarding lawbreakers, this is about rewarding hard work and the kind of spirit that made this nation great and prosperous.”

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The Reform Institute is a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) educational organization, representing an unique, independent voice working to strengthen the foundations of our democracy. The Institute champions the national interest by formulating and advocating meaningful reform in vital areas of public policy, including campaign finance and election reform, climate stewardship, homeland security and immigration. Visit our website at www.reforminstitute.org. We Care America, a 501(c)(3) charity, strengthens faith-based and community organizations that serve people in need by supporting and leveraging public, corporate and private resources. Please visit us online www.wecareamerica.org.