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TO: Interested Parties

FROM: Ali Noorani, Executive Director
National Immigration Forum and National Immigration Forum Action Fund

RE: Winning in 2017 begins now

Over the next 18 months, the National Immigration Forum seeks to challenge both parties to be their best selves, speaking to the opportunities, skills and status of new Americans in a rapidly globalizing and diversifying environment.

By organizing conservative and moderate constituencies, urging Republicans and Democrats alike to move forward with a constructive debate leading to constructive reforms and marginalizing our opposition, we set a stage for legislative action in 2017. If we succeed, a stage occupied by those acting in the interests of America's ability to thrive and prosper.

If we squander the opportunity of 2015-16 to increase support for immigrants and immigration among base conservative constituencies, the odds of passing immigration reform in 2017 decrease dramatically. To be successful, we aim to implement the following strategies:

- Show a depth of support for reform in key states among evangelicals, law enforcement and business
- Shape the presidential campaign's narrative regarding immigration reform by placing faith, law enforcement and business leadership voices into local and national media
- Create a network of trained volunteers and a vibrant digital strategy to supplement paid staff and help scale the approach
- Offer innovative immigration policy solutions to needs in the faith, law enforcement business communities

This memo describes our work to date, current state of play, tactical approach and budget.

A Different Approach

On December 18, 2010, the DREAM Act fell to defeat in the U.S. Senate after a deeply partisan debate. The frustration of Senators – Democrat and Republican who knew the vote should have gone differently – was only eclipsed by the profound sadness of DREAMers, advocates and their allies.

For the Forum, it was a defining moment.

Our analysis led us to evangelical, law enforcement and business leaders in the Southeast, Midwest and Mountain West; the influential stakeholders we needed in order to build political support for reform. So, we took a different approach.

Yes, the electoral power of New American voters and their progressive allies would get us close to winning. However, the only way Republican lawmakers would vote for immigration reform –

discrete bills or a comprehensive package – was if their conservative constituents publicly supported the need for immigration reform.

Furthermore, if we were successful in bridging support for immigrants and immigration across cultural and political lines, the racial and ethnic tensions caused by a fast diversifying nation could be discussed rationally, rather than debated emotionally.

We launched our formative campaign *Forging a New Consensus on Immigrants and America* in 2011, setting the groundwork for a network of conservative faith, law enforcement and business leaders in specific regions. We learned that even as the electoral politics of 2011-2012 pushed many stakeholders to their partisan corners, a powerful political constellation of conservative voices in support of immigrants and immigration could be built.

The value proposition we offered was, “If you hold a Bible, wear a badge or own a business, you want a commonsense solution to the immigration dilemma.” This value proposition – and the energy it generated – built a network of conservative allies that came to be known as *Bibles, Badges and Business for Immigration Reform* (BBB).

Because of our work, and the work of our partners, the Senate passed S. 744 on June 27, 2013 on a bipartisan 68-32 vote (an increase of 13 affirmative votes from the 2010 DREAM Act on a far more comprehensive bill).

Come Spring 2014, the wind was at our back. Support was growing, conventional wisdom in favor of reform was hardening, and House leadership had blessed the drafting of legislation as well as the organization of a whip count.

Reports confirmed that by early June, Congressmen Ryan, Diaz-Balart and others had identified up to 144 House Republicans ready to support a broad immigration reform package.

Two days before presenting their findings to House leadership, Majority Leader Eric Cantor fell to a stunning defeat in the June 10, 2014 Virginia primary. And, within the next month, a crisis of unaccompanied children fleeing violence in Central America presenting themselves at the U.S.-Mexico border overtook the narrative, effectively killing any efforts for immigration reform in the 113th Congress.

Events outside our control had changed our legislative fate.

Weeks later President Obama announced his intention to move forward with a series of executive actions granting temporary relief to millions of undocumented immigrants.

The Importance of 2015 – 2016

The evidence of academic evaluations, polling, conversations with policymakers from both sides of the aisle, and allies in the field has validated and confirmed our overall strategy to build conservative support for immigrants and immigration. This not only creates local pro-immigrant support (and pressure) for Republican members of Congress but also changes the public narrative. For instance, most Republican policymakers now support a path to legal status

for the undocumented. That was an unthinkable position in 2010. In addition, the tone of the debate has changed, with much less inflammatory language used now than five years ago.

Looking back on our efforts, there are certainly things we could have done differently: better data collection, more aggressive engagement of local pastors, direct more resources to law enforcement organizing, a more robust digital approach, and engaging House champions much earlier in the process so there was no space between Senate and House legislative campaigns.

We may not need to do anything dramatically differently. But, we have to do what we do better.

Just as we worked in 2011-2012 to set the stage for the immigration reform campaign of 2013-2014, the next 18 months are crucial to building momentum. We aim to set the stage for action on immigration reform in the first 100 days of the 115th Congress by increasing conservative support for immigrants and immigration. To achieve this goal, we will put in motion the following strategies:

- Broaden and deepen conservative faith, law enforcement and business support of immigrants and immigration
- Influence the electoral narrative through creative content, strategic events and smart organizing
- Develop and disseminate innovative policy papers on the need for immigration reform

State of Play

In addition to the deep polarization caused by President Obama's November 2014 executive actions, the 114th Congress faces busy legislative calendars before the presidential primary season kicks off in earnest in August 2015.

Making matters worse, the fact is the majority of Republican House Members have no short term political incentive to support reform. Moreover, with anti-immigrant Senators Grassley and Sessions occupying crucial committee roles, the Senate is fraught with hazards.

But, as attention turns to the primaries, and Pope Francis addresses Congress on September 24, candidates will be under increasing pressure to take a position on immigrants and immigration. A position that will be remembered by pro-reform voters in the general election.

Importantly, the narrative is fast settling around the importance of the Latino vote. And, as the race crystallizes, the importance of Colorado, Florida, Nevada, North Carolina and Virginia – and the role of Latino voters in these states – will weigh heavy on strategists and pundits alike. Meanwhile, Republican leaders eager to hold their Senate majority are facing tight elections of incumbents in Florida, Illinois, Indiana, North Carolina and Ohio and of challengers in Colorado and Nevada.

Efforts by presidential candidates to be constructive will run against extremists' efforts to [eliminate](#) the 14th Amendment, [curb legal](#) immigration and dismantle President Obama's executive actions. All of which are measures and messages driving valuable Latino and Asian voters (and younger white voters) away from Republican candidates.

Bottom line: without constructive legislation, opponents to reform fill the political vacuum and they drag the immigration debate among conservatives further to the extreme.

To mitigate this situation, Republicans will begin to file legislation – beyond the current enforcement only measures – in both chambers. Similar to existing enforcement only provisions (i.e. border and interior enforcement), these proposals have a very slim chance of making it to the president's desk. They will be insufficiently conservative to get the necessary number of Republican votes, and too conservative to get the necessary number of Democratic votes.

But, the bills will be a point of debate for policy makers, stakeholders and candidates that influence the presidential narrative and, much more importantly, Republican legislators who will be crucial stakeholders in 2017.

Yes, the stage we are setting is one built by the presidential campaigns. However, the crucial actors in 2017 will be Republican members of Congress.

Tactics and Timeline

To take advantage of opportunities in this Congress and set the stage for the 115th we must:

- Show a depth of support for reform in key states among evangelicals, law enforcement and business
- Shape the presidential campaign's narrative regarding immigration reform by placing faith, law enforcement and business leadership voices into local and national media
- Create a network of trained volunteers and a vibrant digital strategy to supplement paid staff and help scale the approach
- Offer innovative immigration policy solutions to needs in the faith, law enforcement business communities

At our height, we had nearly 40 organizers and communications staff working to engage conservative faith, law enforcement and business leaders. Due to funding constraints, our field staff has shrunk to a mere seven organizers – funded through June 2015 only. (Important to note that our field staff is uniquely effective because they are members of the communities they organize – not political operatives parachuting into an issue.)

Assuming we raise the resources to fund a barebones field staff, we will focus on Colorado, Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina and Texas to maximize impact. These are all states that will have a significant impact on the narrative and are home to a critical mass of significant Congressional actors. For other states, Iowa and Illinois, for example, we will broaden and deepen our network with trained volunteers, digital strategies and partner with allied organizations. Constituency oriented staff (i.e. law enforcement or veterans) will work across a broader range of states to strengthen their respective national networks.

Communications

Our communications strategy is to identify and amplify the messengers – and messages – that resonate with the constituencies that build support for immigrants and immigration. Our network of center-right surrogates – built through the relationships generated by our

constituency organizing – challenges both parties to be their best selves, and positions the Forum as the local and national, politically neutral voice seeking responsible and compassionate solutions to our immigration system.

The fact is press and policymakers alike look to the Forum for conservative local and national leaders to speak to immigrants and immigration. No other organization can provide both the range of perspective and the depth of expertise in order to advance the debate.

Our overarching message is:

For a changing America to thrive, new Americans must have the opportunities, skills and status to reach their fullest potential. All of us benefit when immigrants can contribute as fully as possible to our economy, workforce and community.

For each of the organizing tactics below, we will implement a parallel earned and digital communications approach. Furthermore, for each constituency leader we are able to provide the language, research and support necessary for their message to have the greatest impact.

As the environment changes, we distribute updated talking point to our network of faith, law enforcement and business surrogates across the country. At key moments, we organize press statements capturing quotes from a range of perspectives.

The Forum is one of the few organizations able to challenge both parties, maintain political neutrality and advance a policy agenda by engaging and educating local and national media. We are able to speak the language of the left and the right, communicating the needs and interests of immigrants as well as faith, law enforcement and business communities.

Bibles

Through our work with the [Evangelical Immigration Table](#) (EIT), our aim is to increase the network of evangelical pastors willing to publicly support immigration reform, directly mobilize church members and engage younger evangelicals, including college and seminary students. Specifically, we will:

- **Increase Signatories to the EIT Statement of Principles:** 1,400 local church pastors and leaders, whose congregations include more than 370,000 people, have endorsed the EIT Statement of Principles. We will seek to increase the number of signatories to reach 2,500 by 2017, engaging evangelical musicians, athletes, and business leaders to affirm the Principles through press events, speeches or earned media.
- **Evangelical Business Leaders:** Launch *Evangelical Business Leaders for Immigration Reform* as a network of influential local and national Christian business leaders to speak publicly about the biblical and economic values of immigration reform. We will particularly focus outreach upon corporations who both rely upon an immigrant workforce and whose executives are known for their Christian faith.
- **EIT Mobilizers Program:** Recruit high caliber, volunteer church mobilizers in order to expand the grassroots reach of the Table. The Mobilizers will focus on reaching out to local church leaders and encouraging them to address immigration as a discipleship issue.

- Regional Pastor Meetings: Regional pastor meetings will provide a space for pastors to share best practices and sermons, encouraging pastors to engage their full congregations in addressing the issue of immigration from a biblical perspective.
- EIT Border Tours: Recruit local pastors to take part in faith-based educational tours along the Southwest border. Increase understanding among conservative leaders of border issues, bringing an important faith perspective to the issue.
- Building the Pray4Reform List: Currently over 10,000 individuals have joined the EIT “Prayer Partners” list, receiving regular updates and advocacy opportunities. Methodically build the list through a range of events in order to strengthen the Table’s digital efforts in preparation for legislative opportunities.
- G92: Expand the reach of the G92 initiative to educate and equip Christian students on college campuses and seminaries, building a movement of young evangelicals ready to advocate at key moments and to ensure that a concern for the wellbeing of immigrants is engrained within emerging leaders of the evangelical churches.

Badges

Our law enforcement work has expanded in two important ways. First, we established [*Veterans for Immigration Reform*](#), a network of armed services veterans from across the nation who advocate for immigration reform. Second, we launched the *Law Enforcement on Immigration Task Force*, a network of local police chiefs and sheriffs from across the country speaking to the need for immigration reform and thoughtful administrative practices.

In order to expand the network of military veterans advocating for immigration reform, we will convene “Vets4Reform Roundtables” in target states. From these roundtables, we will establish a “Vets4Reform Agenda” to focus on key administrative and legislative goals that serve immigrant veterans, active duty members and their families.

In the traditional law enforcement space, the *Law Enforcement on Immigration Task Force* will:

- Engage White House and Department of Homeland Security leadership on the implementation of the Priority Enforcement Program, border security measures, and other immigration enforcement policies which impact local law enforcement
- Publicly and privately urge members of Congressional delegations to support immigration reform legislation
- Seek opportunities to add constructive law enforcement voice to issues such as U Visas or local hiring practices
- Engage national law enforcement associations such as National Sheriffs’ Association, International Association of Chiefs of Police, Major Cities Chiefs Police Association and others
- Issue policy papers outlining issues facing local law enforcement and solutions that address community safety concerns

For both law enforcement and veterans’ constituencies, Forum communications staff will draft talking points, op-eds and facilitate media interviews.

Business

With their attacks on legal immigration – as well as their predictable diatribes against undocumented immigrants – gaining traction in the presidential primaries, Senator Sessions and friends are taking aim at business interests. In their response, the challenge for business leadership is to speak to the needs and aspirations of native-born workers, that immigrants and immigration are a net-plus for the United States economy and that immigrants are members of communities, not just workers.

All to say, business leaders fully engaged in the debate at the local and national level are more important than ever. Voices of high profile, credible leaders from manufacturing, agricultural and technology, can tell a compelling story of how all Americans thrive when immigrants reach their fullest potential.

To elevate business leadership, we will:

- Recruit CEOs of major companies to publish op-eds, participate in earned media events and/or meet with candidates/policy makers at strategic moments.
- Partner local and national business leaders with faith and law enforcement allies to engage press and policy makers. (The above efforts by the Evangelical Immigration Table to engage Christian-led businesses as an example.)
- Working with partner organizations, publish and disseminate research that highlights economic damage incurred by our nation's broken immigration system.

Budget

At the height of the 2013-2014 legislative campaign, our annual budget for BBB was approximately \$4 million. Now, with a dramatically reduced staff, our BBB budget is \$2 million – 32% of the Forum's overall expenses.

As of this writing, our infrastructure is only funded through June 30, 2015. To sustain this infrastructure through the remainder of the year and execute the above plan, we must raise approximately \$660,000.

Conclusion

Winning in 2017 begins now.

Long gone are the day of party supermajorities. Legislative victories will require bipartisanship instigated by pressure on either party to reach a compromise. We got tantalizingly close in 2014 to victory because pressure from the left forced Democrats to the middle, and support from the right forced Senate Republicans to a compromise. We could not muster the same dynamic in the House.

Which is why the work must continue. If we pull up stakes, all we have built will disappear. If we continue to engage conservatives and their Republican representatives, support will only grow.

This isn't the sexy, glamorous work of presidential campaigning. This is the ugly, hard work of preparing for legislation.