

Odd bedfellows alert: Chamber, AFL-CIO reach an immigration agreement

By Suzy Khimm , Updated: February 21, 2013

Business and labor have struggled to find consensus on immigration reform, but two of their biggest representatives have just achieved a breakthrough. The AFL-CIO and U.S. Chamber of Commerce have [agreed to](#) three immigration reforms that reflect their new consensus over how to handle future immigrant workers, suggesting that they'll finally break the [impasse](#) that contributed to the collapse of the 2007 immigration overhaul. The two groups are still working out to hammer out a final deal with more details, but the shared principles are a sign of unmistakable progress.

The Senate and the White House seem to have been waiting for the AFL-CIO and the Chamber to come to an agreement about how to deal with the future inflow of immigrant workers. After weeks of deliberation, the two groups have agreed in principle upon reforms that address “the needs of business in a market-driven way, while also fully protecting the wages and working conditions of U.S. and immigrant workers,” according to their joint statement.

Here are the three major reforms that the AFL-CIO and the Chamber are backing in principle:

1) **A new worker visa program.** That’s a big concession to business, but the new program would also address some of labor’s concerns, by “provid[ing] labor mobility in a way that still gives American workers a first shot at available jobs, and that automatically adjusts as the American economy expands and contracts.” The statement suggests that there would also be a potential path for these temporary visa-holders to become more permanent residents by “not keep[ing] all workers in a permanent temporary status.”

2) **A new federal bureau to study labor shortages.** It would be a politically independent office that would use “real-world data about labor markets and demographics” to determine whether there are labor shortages that could be filled by immigrant workers, according to the statement. This is a big concession to labor, which has long called for an independent bureau to dictate the number of visas. This agreement doesn’t go that far, but the new “professional bureau” that it proposes would aim to “inform Congress and the public” about labor market issues, with a structure similar to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

3) **Better information about jobs for native-born workers:** The joint statement stresses that “American workers should have a first crack at available jobs.” Accordingly, the groups want to do a better job to inform native-born workers about “job openings in lesser-skilled occupations” — making sure that such information reaches disadvantaged communities, in particular.

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