

Statement of
The Honorable Charles E. Schumer

United States Senator
New York
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Opening Statement of Chairman Schumer
Comprehensive Immigration Reform In 2009 Can We Do It and How
Subcommittee on Immigration, Refugees and Border Security April 30, 2009

Before we begin today's business, I'd like to take the opportunity to recognize the remarkable leadership that my predecessor--Senator Kennedy--has provided to this subcommittee.

For the last 46 years, Senator Kennedy has been at the forefront of every major immigration debate in this country as a member, chairman, or ranking member of this subcommittee.

I'm sure I speak for my colleagues when I say that no senator has worked harder and contributed more to the immigration conversation than Senator Kennedy, and we all sincerely thank him for his leadership.

Since I became Chairman of this Subcommittee in February, I am often asked the very questions that we hope to begin to answer today: "Can we achieve significant immigration reform in this session of Congress and, if so, what would this reform look like?"

People only need to pick up a newspaper or turn on their televisions to see many stories quoting Washington insiders and political pundits who say it is bad politics to even discuss immigration reform at a time when America is facing such serious economic challenges.

But these articles do not report what I am hearing in my conversations with the American people. No one is happy with our current system, whether they are left, right, or center. There is recognition in America that the status quo is not working. Indeed, recent polls show that 57% of Americans believe that immigration reform should be a high priority for this Congress. The politics may be hard, but reality is obvious: it is everyone's best interests to change and fix our current immigration system.

And it is therefore my belief that we can and must try to find a way to enact significant improvements to our immigration system now.

So, how do we get from here to there?

From my perspective, it is time to tone down the rhetoric, focus on the facts, and carefully weigh what it in the best interests of our taxpayers, our economy, our security, and our future.

That is the spirit in which we have called today's hearings, and the spirit in which we can conduct our considerations moving forward.

It is my belief that the American people are pro-legal immigration and anti-illegal immigration. It is my belief that the American people are not afraid of an immigration system that is both tough and fair. They want an immigration system that both faces up to reality and respects the rule of law. They want an immigration system that will stop the flow of illegal immigrants and respect legal immigrants who want to work, pay taxes, remain in this country and become citizens.

That is what I want too, and I believe that is what the majority of my colleagues here in the Senate want.

But make no mistake: we cannot restore confidence in our immigration system until and unless we face up to reality, put ideology aside, and find solutions that will work to address the situation in which we find ourselves today.

I am hopeful that we can find solutions, because a well-functioning immigration system is not only a part of America's legacy - it is also critical to our country's future.

The founding fathers never intended for America to close the door to new Americans, and in each generation since the birth of our country we have accepted the most determined and idealistic people from everywhere in the world.

And we have always been stronger for it.

Because of immigration, Google, Yahoo, Intel, and Ebay are American success stories. In New York, one-quarter of all businesses are immigrant-owned. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, these immigrant-owned New York businesses have combined sales of \$42.7 billion, and employ over 230,000 workers.

Nationally, 40% of patents in the U.S. are awarded to immigrants. And a recent study found that immigrants are 50% likelier to start businesses than native-born citizens. New inventions and start-up businesses are critical to improving our economy and, as the numbers tell us, immigrants play a vital role in both of these areas.

Given the very high stakes in whether and how we move forward on the issue of immigration, we have invited a broad spectrum of our country's finest and most distinguished leaders to share their wisdom and experience.

These individuals come from a broad array of disciplines, and offer vastly diverse perspectives regarding immigration based upon their training and their area of expertise.

These distinguished witnesses will tell us whether they agree that comprehensive immigration reform is necessary and should be enacted in 2009. They will also help us determine what a reformed system might look like.

As we go forward with this hearing today and with this debate throughout the year, I hope that my colleagues will agree to work together to capitalize on areas of consensus rather than exploit

areas of disagreement.

For instance, although my colleague, the distinguished ranking member from Texas, and I, may have some ideological differences, we both approach the immigration conversation from a common starting point: we are both senators from border-states with long and rich histories of welcoming immigrants from all over the world.

In fact, the Texas Seaport at Galveston became known as "the Second Ellis Island."

And that's why our discourse on immigration should take place with the common understanding that even if we all came to America on a different boat (or through some other means), we are all in the same boat now.

So, as Chairman of this subcommittee, I pledge that I will work and work and work and work to strike the right balance and achieve the critical reforms to our immigration system that the American people are asking us to enact. This will be very, very hard to do, make no mistake. But we have to try.

I am confident that our distinguished panel will move us closer toward a pathway to reform, and I look forward with great interest to their testimony.

I now recognize the distinguished ranking member, Senator Cornyn, for an opening statement.

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