

Testimony of

The Honorable Orrin Hatch

May 2, 2002

Thank you, Mr. Chairman for holding this hearing today. As we all know, the job of the Immigration and Naturalization Service is an important one. We also all know that the INS currently stands in drastic need of reform so it can effectively enforce our immigration laws while providing necessary services in a timely manner. I commend Senator Kennedy and the Ranking Member of the Immigration Subcommittee, Senator Brownback, for their efforts on this issue.

Marked by massive backlogs and conflicting missions, the INS has long been in need of reform. Reorganization has been a priority for some time, and several attempts, both administrative and legislative, have been made. One of the most significant improvements is President Bush's nomination of James Ziglar, who was unanimously approved of by this Committee and the Senate just last July, specifically with reform of the INS in mind. I commend Commissioner Ziglar, who is clearly making his best efforts to rescue the INS, not only for his attempts to build a better immigration service, but also for his leadership following the September 11th terrorist attacks. Those attacks, combined with recent INS blunders, have subjected the INS to an even more critical examination. I realize that especially since September 11th, Mr. Ziglar's position has not been an easy or particularly enviable one.

With regard to specific restructuring proposals for the Immigration and Naturalization Service, I believe it is important to be cautious. The bill that the House passed is significant, but does have room for improvement. The proposal we have been crafting here in the Senate adds some improvement, and I look forward to working more closely with Chairman Sensenbrenner and Senators Kennedy, Brownback, and Leahy to get consensus legislation to build the very best agency possible.

In any INS reform measure we pursue, we must stay focused on what is broken and what is not. While some practices within the INS require a specific repair, such as the clear separation of the enforcement and service missions, some are working generally well and should not be tinkered with. For example, I feel very strongly that critical field offices for services and enforcement, which provide immigrants with realistic access to service centers and the federal government with the necessary tools to enforce immigration laws locally, should not be sacrificed in the name of consolidation. I understand the need to draw clear lines of authority, but we should not trade smaller, more accessible field offices for super-sized offices unless there is a clear reason to do so. I appreciate the sponsors' willingness to work with me to protect local offices, and I thank them for agreeing to include such a provision in the Senate bill.

Again, I want to thank the Chairman and Senator Brownback for turning the Committee's attention to this important issue. I believe that we have some real potential to make a difference here, and I am proud to be an original cosponsor of this legislation.

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