

Statement of  
**The Honorable John Conyers**

United States Representative  
Michigan  
October 5, 2004

STATEMENT OF REP. JOHN CONYERS, JR.  
Senate Committee on the Judiciary  
Hearing on Foreign Born President Amendments  
226 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
10 AM, Tuesday, October 5, 2004

I am here to support amending the Constitution to permit foreign born citizens to seek the presidency. I believe that no citizen should be denied the opportunity to seek the nation's highest office. I have spent my entire life fighting for equal rights, and I think there is no reason that we should differentiate between our citizens when it comes to the ability to seek elected office.

As you know, Article II of the Constitution provides that only natural-born citizens are entitled to hold the Office of President. I believe this limitation now contradicts the principles for which this country stands. This nation prides itself on its diversity of culture, experience, and opinion. This quality is achieved only by welcoming immigrants to this country, allowing them to become citizens, and enabling them make full contributions to society.

I believe that it is the American dream to have the ability to run for president. Every citizen of this country would like to be able to look in their child's room at night and believe that one day they too can grow up to be president.

It is important to point out that the distinction between natural born and foreign born citizens is unique, unwarranted, and antiquated in our country. In every other respect, the United States treats its citizens, those natural-born and foreign-born, the same. By having this one limitation, we are denying ourselves exemplary leaders. In fact, some foreign-born citizens are our country's greatest public servants, including two sitting governors, two current cabinet members, and two recent secretaries of state.

There also are 700 foreign-born citizens who have received the Medal of Honor and more than 12.5 million foreign borne citizens who are ineligible to seek the presidency. A 2002 Pentagon study reports that more than 30,000 foreign-born citizens are currently serving in the U.S. military. Allowing the United States to be a better country because of the contributions that foreign-born citizens make, and then not allowing them to fully participate in all aspects of society, is un-American.

I realize that constitutional amendments are rare and that those proposed should be subject to great scrutiny. I, for one, truly respect our Constitution and am hesitant to see it amended.

Therefore, it is after great consideration and with the utmost gravity that I introduced my own amendment.

I am hopeful that my colleagues in Congress will properly consider the amendment and realize that every citizen of the United States should be entitled to dream of becoming President.