

Statement of

The Honorable John Cornyn

United States Senator
Texas
May 17, 2005

U.S. Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration, Border Security and Citizenship
U.S. Senator John Cornyn (R-TX), Chairman

"The Need for Comprehensive Immigration Reform:
Strengthening Our National Security"

Tuesday, May 17, 2005, 2:30 p.m., Dirksen Senate Office Building Room 226

OPENING STATEMENT OF U.S. SENATOR JOHN CORNYN

This joint hearing of the Senate Subcommittee on Immigration, Border Security and Citizenship and the Subcommittee on Terrorism, Technology and Homeland Security shall come to order.

I want to thank Chairman Specter for scheduling today's hearing.

This hearing is the first in a series of hearings to examine the need for comprehensive reform of our immigration system.

I want to thank Senator Kyl for his hard work and for his leadership. As we announced a few weeks ago, he and I are working together to identify and develop solutions to the critical problems in our immigration system. I also want to thank the ranking member of this subcommittee, Senator Kennedy, as well as Senator Feinstein, the ranking member of the Terrorism subcommittee, and their respective staffs for working with my office to make this hearing possible. Any effort to reform and to strengthen enforcement of our immigration system, to be successful in the Senate, must be bipartisan, and I look forward to working with them both.

Our nation's immigration and border security system is badly broken. It leaves our borders unprotected, threatens our national security, and makes a mockery of the rule of law. The system has suffered from years of neglect, and in a post-9/11 world, we cannot tolerate this situation any longer. National security demands a comprehensive solution to our immigration system - and that means both stronger enforcement and reasonable reform of our immigration laws. We must solve this problem - and solve it now.

For far too long, the debate over immigration has divided Americans of good will into one of two camps - those who are angry and frustrated by our failure to enforce the rule of law, and those who are angry and frustrated that our immigration laws do not reflect reality.

But both camps are right. This is not an either/or proposition. We need stronger enforcement and reasonable reform of our immigration laws.

First, we must recognize that, in the past, we simply have not devoted the funds, resources, and manpower to enforce our immigration laws and protect our borders. That must change - and will change. No discussion of comprehensive immigration reform is possible without a clear commitment to, and a substantial and dramatic escalation of, our efforts to enforce the law.

That is why these two sub-committees have embarked on a series of hearings over the past two months, devoted exclusively to the topic of strengthening enforcement throughout our nation's immigration system - at the border, between the ports of entry, and within the interior of our nation. These hearings have shown that the men and women who operate our immigration system work hard and do their best, and we appreciate their dedication. But our border inspection and security system at the ports of entry is full of holes. Our deployment of manpower and use of technology to secure the border between the ports of entry is inadequate. And our deportation process is over-litigated and under-equipped.

So we need stronger enforcement. But enforcement alone will not get the job done. Nor will our immigration system be fixed merely by throwing money at the problem. Our laws must be reformed as well as enforced.

Any reform proposal must serve both our national security and our national economy. It must be both capable of securing our country and compatible with growing our economy. Our current broken system provides badly needed sources of labor, but through illegal channels - posing a substantial and unacceptable risk to our national security. Yet simply closing our borders would secure our nation only by weakening our economy. Any comprehensive solution must address both concerns.

Our hearing today will examine the national security justifications for immigration reform. Of the over 10 million people currently in our country without legal status, and of the hundreds of thousands who enter every year undetected, some fraction of the population may harbor evil impulses towards our country. Yet it is a practical impossibility to separate the well-meaning from the ill-intentioned. We must focus our scarce resources on the highest risks. Law enforcement and border security officials should focus their greatest energies on those who wish to do us harm - not those who wish only to help themselves and their families through work. We cannot have a population of more than 10 million within which terrorists and their supporters can easily hide. And we cannot have that population afraid to cooperate with our law enforcement and anti-terrorism efforts.

Next week, the Senate will examine the economic justifications for immigration reform. Our economy would badly suffer if we removed millions of workers from our national workforce - just as it would suffer if we eliminated entire stocks of natural resources from our national inventory. Our economy would be strengthened if all workers could simply come out of the shadows, register, pay taxes, and participate fully in our economy.

President Bush has taken the lead and articulated a vision for the comprehensive reform of our nation's immigration laws - in the interests of our nation, our national security, our national economy, and the rule of law. I am heartened that in recent months we have seen a growing recognition and consensus, across the political spectrum, that a comprehensive immigration solution is long overdue.

Along these lines, Senators McCain and Kennedy have introduced an immigration reform measure. I also understand that Senator Hagel will be introducing his comprehensive proposal in the near future as well. And Senator Kyl and I recently announced on the Senate floor that we will introduce comprehensive legislation which will strengthen enforcement, control our borders and reform our nation's immigration laws.

I look forward to the critical role that this subcommittee will play in the coming Congressional debate on these various proposals and, as Chairman of this sub-committee, I will work to bring the disparate voices together to craft a comprehensive solution. This is a complex problem, and no one has a monopoly on good ideas.

I want to reiterate that solving our immigration and border security problems should not be an either-or proposition. We are a nation of laws and a nation of immigrants. We need an immigration system that serves our national security and our national economy, as well as our national commitment to the rule of law. We must strengthen enforcement of law, but we must also enact laws that are capable of strong enforcement.

And with that, I will turn the floor over to Senator Kyl, and then to Senator Kennedy and Senator Feinstein, for any introductory remarks that they each may have.