

Statement of

The Honorable John Cornyn

United States Senator
Texas
May 26, 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:
Serving Our National Economy."

Thursday, May 26, 2005, 2:30 p.m., Dirksen Senate Office Building Room 226

OPENING STATEMENT OF U.S. SENATOR JOHN CORNYN

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

I want to thank Chairman Specter for scheduling today's hearing. I also want to thank Senator Kennedy, the ranking member of this subcommittee, for working with me to make this hearing possible.

This subcommittee has held a number of significant immigration hearings this year and I appreciate Senator Kennedy working with me to make each of these hearings productive.

Introduce Hearing

Today we continue our review of the immigration system. Our immigration and border security system is badly broken, due to years of neglect. In this post-9/11 world we simply do not have the luxury of accepting this status quo 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.

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. As history amply demonstrates, reform without enforcement fails. 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 Senator Kyl and I embarked on a series of hearings in March and April, 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 enforcement hearings have shown that 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 deficient; 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.

Accordingly, just last week, we began a series of hearings examining the benefit that comprehensive reform would provide our country. Noted experts testified that national security would be bolstered if we properly reformed the system. Specifically, they testified that any reform should be designed to allow the government to focus its efforts on those who mean to do us harm as opposed to expending resources on those who merely want to work. Reform along these lines would allow law enforcement to target its limited resources where it belongs on high priorities such as smugglers, drug dealers and terrorists.

Today, we shift our focus to explore the importance of immigration reform to our national economy.

Our current economic system provides badly needed sources of labor to many areas of commerce that sorely need it - but through illegal channels.

Commissioner Bonner has previously testified before this subcommittee that the vast majority of those the border patrol apprehends are migrant workers simply coming here to work. He said "... the Border Patrol is still dealing with a literal flood of people on a daily basis ... most of whom are attempting to enter this country in order to work."

While the situation Commissioner Bonner faces at the borders represent a substantial and unacceptable risk to our national security, it also demonstrates why we cannot simply close our borders or round up and remove millions of people. We do not have the resources, the facilities, or the ability to identify, locate and apprehend 10-12 million undocumented workers. Securing our nation's borders at the expense of weakening our economy by choking off or removing needed sources of labor is not an acceptable alternative.

But even if we were equipped to do so, our economy would badly suffer if we stripped millions of workers from our national workforce - just as it would suffer if we eliminated entire stocks of natural resources from our national inventory. On the other hand, our economy would be strengthened if all workers could simply come out of the shadows, register, pay taxes, and participate fully in our economy.

I hope that today's hearing will help us better understand the benefits that would accrue to our national economy should we properly reform our immigration system. Some have expressed concerns about the impact of reforming the immigration system on the American worker. Today's hearing will examine those concerns.

To be sure, America is a welcoming nation. The hard work and strength of our immigrants have made our Nation prosperous. And many immigrants and sons and daughters of immigrants have joined the military to help safeguard the liberty of America, advance scientific discoveries, and otherwise lead our nation at various times. Nevertheless, we must craft a fair and consistent system that reforms our Nation's immigration laws without harming the economic security of Americans.

I want to end by noting that a bipartisan group of former INS Commissioners wrote to me recently, calling for a comprehensive immigration solution that both protects our national security and serves our national economy. The desire of these dedicated public servants to see the immigration system enforced and reformed transcends political ideology and is formed by years in the trenches. We would do well to heed their call.

I am confident that Americans, working together, will rise to this challenge and find a solution that serves the best interest of our country. And with that, I will turn the floor over to Senator Kennedy for any introductory remarks he may have.