

Statement of

# The Honorable Patrick Leahy

United States Senator  
Vermont  
May 26, 2005

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Subcommittee on Immigration, Border Security, and Citizenship  
Hearing on "The Need for Comprehensive Immigration Reform:  
Serving Our National Economy"  
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This hearing reminds me of one held by the Judiciary Committee on September 7, 2001, four days before the 9/11 attacks. Thomas Donahue testified at that hearing as well, along with John Sweeney of the AFL-CIO, with both supporting meaningful reform of our immigration system. Unfortunately but understandably, the terrorist attacks put an end to serious hopes for reforming our system for a number of years, as Congress and the Administration instead focused on the steps required to secure our borders. Having devoted so much time, attention and resources to that question for the last four years - though there certainly remains more to do -- we are now again presented with the opportunity to make meaningful and common-sense changes to our immigration laws, and I hope we seize it.

The bill introduced by Senators McCain and Kennedy, the Secure America and Orderly Immigration Act (S. 1033), presents the roadmap for a solution. It provides incentives to the illegal population to come forward and legalize their status on a temporary basis, while also speeding the process for those outside the country who have played by all the rules in their efforts to come to the United States. This bipartisan legislation should be the focus of this committee's efforts.

I have previously pointed out that our economy depends on the labor of the more than 10 million illegal aliens who are currently in our nation. Were it possible to deport all of these aliens tomorrow - which of course it is not - our economy would probably go into shock. But the status quo is not the way to run our society. None of us, whatever our political party, should tolerate a system where our employers rely on unauthorized workers, and where those workers have little recourse to the legal protections that lawful workers enjoy. We need to regularize this system, and the McCain-Kennedy bill would do exactly that.

I look forward to reviewing the testimony of today's witnesses and to moving ahead with real immigration reform.

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