

Statement of

The Honorable John Cornyn

United States Senator
Texas
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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: Securing the Cooperation of Participating Countries."

Thursday, June 30, 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, and thank you, Senator Kennedy, for working with me on this hearing.

Today we continue a series of hearings examining the need for comprehensive reform of our immigration system. These hearings have shown that our nation's immigration and border security system is badly broken and 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. 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. As history demonstrates, reform without enforcement is doomed to failure. No discussion of comprehensive immigration reform is possible without a clear commitment to, and a substantial escalation of, our efforts to enforce the law. Recognizing this necessity, on May 26th Senator Kyl and I released the border enforcement portion of our legislation which address those areas of border security that need improvement.

But increased enforcement alone will not solve the problem. Any reform proposal must serve both our national security and our national economy. It must be both capable of securing our country and it must also be compatible with growing our economy. Our current, broken system provides badly needed sources of labor, but through illegal channels.

As an example, Border Patrol Commissioner Robert 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 testified that "... 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 we face at the borders represents 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. And 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.

Any comprehensive solution must address both concerns so that law enforcement and border security officials can 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. 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.

Today's hearing will focus on the fundamental issue of the level of cooperation the United States can expect from countries that will benefit from comprehensive immigration reform. Workers in this country come from many diverse countries. Essential to successful immigration reform will be increased cooperation on border security, efforts to combat human trafficking and alien smuggling, and stepped-up crime prevention from any country that sends workers to our nation.

We are addressing these types of issues with Mexico and Canada. The United States, Mexico and Canada have entered the Security and Prosperity Partnership agreement designed to develop a common security strategy and promote economic growth. According to this week's announcement, border security remains a central theme of this partnership. I hope that this partnership continues to identify additional security initiatives that our countries can jointly pursue and, that this initiative can serve as a model to address security concerns that relate to other countries.

In addition to assisting with border security, sending countries should further develop strategies which will bridge the development gap between our country and theirs so that its citizens will not want to leave their country. For instance, Mexico's leaders have made clear that it is in their best interests to keep their citizens in their country. Foreign Minister Derbez has said that "[T]he Mexican government has to be able to give Mexicans ... the opportunity to generate the wealth that today they produce in other places." And President Fox has stated that "Every person has the right to find in his own country the economic, political and social opportunities that allow him to reach a full and dignified life."

I could not agree more with these statements. Other countries need for its young, energetic risk takers and hard workers ultimately to come back home, and particularly to come back home with the capital and savings and skills they acquire when they work in the United States. They need these people to come back to their home country, buy a house, start a business, so that these small business owners, these potential entrepreneurs, can help strengthen the middle class.

Today's hearing will explore the relationship of these issues to implementing successful immigration reform. Ultimately, comprehensive immigration reform will require the active cooperation of participating countries because we will have to have better management, communication, and coordination between our governments to achieve our goals of protecting our national security and strengthening our national economy.

With that, I will turn the floor over to Senator Kennedy for any statement he cares to make.