

Statement of

The Honorable Russ Feingold

United States Senator
Wisconsin
July 26, 2005

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Senate Judiciary Committee Hearing on
"Comprehensive Immigration Reform"
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Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am pleased that the Committee, through recent related Subcommittee hearings and this hearing, is taking up this critical issue.

I strongly support efforts to curb illegal immigration and to prevent terrorists from entering our country to do harm. But as we work to protect our nation from future terrorist attacks, I have been, and will continue to be, vigilant to ensure that the federal government is successful in securing our borders while respecting the need for foreign workers, family members, students, businesspeople, visitors, refugees and others who wish to come to our nation legally.

Today, millions of undocumented workers live in and contribute to our communities and economy, in Wisconsin and across the country. But while they work hard and contribute in many ways, these immigrants live in fear, each and every day, of deportation and often of exploitation by unscrupulous employers. Both for our nation's security, and to be true to basic American values of fairness and justice, we should bring these workers out of the shadows. We will all be better off if we create a realistic immigration system that recognizes that we need these workers, that allows them to come into the United States legally, and that ensures the government knows who is entering the country. If we permit these workers to enter the country legally, border agents can focus their efforts on terrorists and others who pose a serious threat to this nation.

We also need to recognize that foreign workers who have paid their dues should be treated fairly and deserve the same protections as other workers. All workers will be better off if guest workers are paid fair wages and are covered by adequate workplace protections.

This is an issue that affects not only these workers, but American employers as well. The law should acknowledge the reality that American businesses need access to foreign workers for jobs they cannot fill with American workers. In Wisconsin, I have heard from many business owners about the need for Congress to fix the broken immigration system. These hard-working Americans want to play by the rules, and cannot fathom why Congress has dragged its feet on this issue for so long. Whether we are talking about agriculture, or tourism, or landscaping, or any of the other industries where foreign workers make valuable contributions, businesses will suffer more than they already have if we fail to enact meaningful, comprehensive, long-term immigration reform.

It is time for Congress to act. So I would like to take a moment to recognize the hard work of my colleagues, Senators Kennedy and McCain. They have introduced legislation that I believe would address many of the issues plaguing the current system. The Secure America and Orderly Immigration Act would vastly improve border security, and would bring meaningful reform to our immigration system in a way that reflects economic reality and the value of keeping families together. I commend them for their efforts, and I intend to support their bill when it comes before the Committee, which I hope will be soon.

In addition, I would like to comment briefly about another proposal introduced by Senators Cornyn and Kyl. While I appreciate their efforts, I have serious concerns about their proposal. In order to be successful, we need an approach that will encourage undocumented workers who are already here to come out of the shadows, that will provide American employers a stable workforce, that ensures that immigrant workers are treated fairly, and that promotes family reunification. The Cornyn-Kyl proposal, though well-intentioned, falls short in these areas.

There is a bipartisan consensus in this country that our immigration policies need to be updated. Although we may not all agree about how to get there, I think we can all agree that this is a serious issue, and one that the Committee should address. I commend my colleagues for their efforts on this issue, I look forward to working with them, and I urge the President to work with Congress to enact comprehensive, sensible immigration reform.