

**Statement of Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.),
Ranking Member, Senate Judiciary Committee,
Hearing on “The Impact of High-Skilled Immigration on U.S. Workers”
February 25, 2016**

I appreciate today’s hearing highlighting the complex questions surrounding high-skilled foreign worker programs and the U.S. workforce. This is an important topic. When used correctly, high-skilled foreign worker programs can help grow our economy and spur job creation in ways that benefit all Americans. That is why I have been deeply troubled to hear recent stories about practices that have led to the dismissal of American workers in exchange for the hiring of foreign workers at various companies.

I have long said that immigrant visa programs must be used to complement the U.S. workforce, not displace it. We must ensure that current laws are not misused in ways that disadvantage American workers.

Some of today’s witnesses will express their concerns with the H-1B program. I share many of those concerns. When immigrant visa programs are misused to depress the wages of American workers and outsource jobs, all workers suffer. These programs should be used to help create opportunities in America, not displace them, but the current allocation system does nothing to achieve that result.

We heard similar concerns about the H-1B visa program last Congress when the Judiciary Committee considered the Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act (S.744). That bipartisan legislation, which passed the Senate with a strong vote of 68-32, would have responded to many concerns of fraud and abuse in immigrant visa programs. It contained vital measures to improve the functioning and administrability of the H-1B program and included important provisions to protect both foreign and American workers from exploitation and displacement. Moreover, it took meaningful steps to help U.S. businesses fill critical job needs, while ensuring protections remain in place to help and train American workers. Importantly, it did so while seeking to fix our immigration system as a whole.

Rather than capitalizing on the positive reforms included in the Senate-passed immigration bill, the Republican-led House did not even allow a vote on it. I regret that the Republican-led Senate has not advanced meaningful immigration legislation that addresses the multitude of problems plaguing our immigration system like we did last Congress. While I welcome today’s hearing, I urge Republicans to return to that bipartisan, constructive approach and fix our broken immigration system once and for all.

It is time to stop making up excuses to delay immigration reform. The perspectives we will hear today illustrate the serious hardships affecting American workers and our economy as a result of our outdated immigration laws and Congressional inaction. We must act on the need for comprehensive immigration reform.

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