

Statement of

# The Honorable Patrick Leahy

United States Senator  
Vermont  
April 14, 2005

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Joint Hearing on "Strengthening Interior Enforcement:  
Deportation and Related Issues"  
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Today's hearing attempts to focus on a wide range of issues. It is also the second joint hearing of the immigration and terrorism subcommittees this year. There is certainly a relationship between the control of our borders and anti-terrorism efforts, but I hope that the Judiciary Committee will not see immigration solely through the lens of terrorism during this Congress.

I know that the Chairman of the immigration subcommittee is concerned that the Department of Homeland Security does not have the resources it needs to enforce our immigration laws within the United States. I share many of his concerns, and I have supported proposals to increase DHS funding on many occasions since September 11. Unfortunately, some of those proposals were opposed by the Bush Administration and defeated by Republican majorities in the Senate. Our current fiscal situation requires us to make hard choices about how to allocate our resources. I believe that enforcement of our immigration laws should take precedence over tax cuts, and I hope that the White House will embrace that view.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), the DHS branch charged with enforcing our immigration laws in the interior, has such budgetary problems that it has instituted a hiring freeze. This is a serious problem. I also sit on the Appropriations Committee, and have expressed my deep concern about these budget woes to Michael Garcia, the head of ICE, and to other DHS officials. They have said they anticipate the hiring freeze will be lifted this year, and we should all monitor their progress closely.

I would like to note a matter of great concern at our borders. We have seen in recent weeks the launching of citizen border patrols in Arizona, where some residents and visitors from other States have suggested they might take policing of our Southwest border into their own hands. Although these individuals may have understandable frustrations about the staffing levels and effectiveness of the Border Patrol, I think we would all agree that a civilian enforcement of our immigration laws is not what any of us want to rely on, and can raise many problems and dangers.

I cannot help but think we could forestall some of this threatened vigilante activity if the President agreed to fully fund the intelligence reform legislation we passed last December. That law mandated an increase of 2,000 Border Patrol agents annually for the next five years, beginning in FY 2006. The President proposed funding only 10 percent of those positions in his budget. Apparently border security is another priority the White House will sacrifice to protect the President's reckless tax cuts. Thankfully, the Senate in its budget provided the funds for the additional agents. The conference committee should retain that funding.