

Statement of

The Honorable Patrick Leahy

United States Senator
Vermont
June 7, 2005

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Joint Subcommittee Hearing
"The Southern Border in Crisis: Resources and Strategies
to Improve National Security"
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I understand and sympathize with the concerns of those Senators who represent States along our Southwest border, and I have done my best to help them address those concerns. For example, I have worked with Senator Feinstein and Senator Kyl to reauthorize the State Criminal Alien Assistance Program (SCAAP), a program that provides little benefit to my State of Vermont but that I know is of great importance to law enforcement and corrections officials in the Southwest. I know that the migration of people over our Southwest border carries great economic costs, including for hospitals and schools, and will continue to help in efforts to share those costs more equally.

That being said, I believe we also need to pay closer attention to the Northern border of the United States. For many years before the 9/11 attacks, the Northern border was virtually ignored as we lavished resources on the Southwest border. That has changed to a degree since the attacks, as Border Patrol staffing on the Northern border has tripled in accordance with the provisions that I authored in the USA PATRIOT Act. Nonetheless, the immigration subcommittee heard just two weeks ago from a witness who stated that a terrorist would be more likely to use the still understaffed Northern border to cross into the United States. It would most definitely not serve our national security to return to the days where we focus exclusively on the Southern border.

Finally, the only way we will truly get a handle on our borders is to adopt an immigration system that acknowledges the economic realities faced by Mexicans and others who desperately want to come to the United States to earn money to support their families, while also protecting the interest of American workers. As I have said before, I believe the McCain-Kennedy bill, the Secure America and Orderly Immigration Act (S. 1033), takes the right approach to immigration reform. It will make it easier for willing workers who have abided by the rules to come to the United States, while also giving the more than 10 million aliens already here illegally an incentive to come forward and announce themselves. I hope that we will have a hearing focused specifically on that legislation.

I look forward to reviewing the testimony of today's witnesses, and I thank them for taking the time to offer this committee their views.