

Testimony of  
**The Honorable Carlos M. Gutierrez**

July 12, 2006

Chairman Specter, Ranking Member Leahy, Members of the Committee, I'm pleased to have this opportunity to discuss comprehensive immigration reform with you. Thank you for your leadership and hard work on this important issue. I believe immigration is the domestic social issue of our time - and a key to our future economic health. The President has called for comprehensive reform that includes protecting our borders and recognizing the needs of our growing economy.

#### Economy

The reality is that our economy is growing faster than any other large, industrialized nation. Our unemployment rate is below the average of the past four decades.

Our economy - like other major industrial economies - faces the challenge of an aging and increasingly educated workforce.

The result is that we have jobs that American citizens either aren't willing or aren't available to do. I continually hear from industries that they are having difficulty finding workers.

In May, we had 4.1 million job openings in the U.S. with a large amount in the hospitality industry. (Bureau of Labor Statistics)

As one example, when I was in Texas in June, Alan Simpson, president of the El Paso Restaurant Association and the Silver Streak hamburger chain, said, "When the unemployment rate is below 5 to 6 percent, it's a real challenge to staff restaurants."

So, immigrants aren't crossing our borders to look for a handout. They're seeking jobs that are available. More than 81 percent of immigrants say, "A person has to work very hard in this country to make it." (Now that I'm here, Public Agenda, 2003)

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I am encouraged that we are starting to reach some consensus: As you know, more than 500 of our nation's top economists

recently sent a letter to President Bush and Congress stating that immigration has been a net gain for American citizens.

And two-thirds of American voters say they support bills that include a temporary worker program or path to citizenship, rather than one that focuses solely on border security. (Ayres McHenry poll, 6/06)

President Bush has called for comprehensive immigration reform to address the many complex issues involved.

Everyone agrees it is essential to secure our borders. The President has proposed:

- ? Increasing the number of Border Patrol agents from approximately 12,000 to more than 18,000;
- ? Increasing the use of technology at the borders, so we can know who is coming through;
- ? And improving processes to become more efficient.

We believe that worksite enforcement is also essential.

There's an underground industry built on producing false documentation for illegal workers, and employers have a hard time helping enforce the law because they are not sure which documents are reliable.

The rules must be clear enough to hold businesses accountable, and we must ensure that businesses have the tools they need to follow the law.

We need to create a temporary worker's program. It would create a legal means for more workers to enter the United States for a limited time to fill labor needs. By providing a legal, enforceable way for immigrants to enter, we would take pressure off of our borders.

The President has called for a program to match willing immigrant workers with willing employers in jobs no Americans have filled. And we need an expanded employment verification system, including biometric card identification for the temporary worker program. We have the technology today to use a person's unique characteristics, such as a fingerprint, to lock in identity.

When we have an effective employment verification system -- and we have a temporary worker's program -- dynamics will change.

Over time, it will become unlikely that people will risk their lives crossing the border if it is well-known that, unless you are in this country legally, you will not find a job. These are some of the most consequential things we can do to make our borders more secure. And they demonstrate

the  
wisdom of comprehensive immigration reform.

The other reality we must confront is that we have 12 million people who are in the country illegally. The President has said that deporting 12 million individuals wouldn't be wise, practical, or humane.

The other extreme is amnesty. The dictionary defines amnesty as an "unconditional pardon - obliterating all memory of the offense." The President does not support amnesty, and it's not accurate or fair to call his solution to this problem amnesty.

We're talking about having a hard-earned path to legalization, which would require meeting conditions:

- ? People waiting their turn at the back of the line,
- ? Paying fines,
- ? Paying taxes,
- ? Learning English,
- ? Undergoing a criminal background check,
- ? And having a job.

When immigrants take the Oath of Allegiance to become American citizens, they give up allegiances to other countries.

They promise to support and defend our Constitution, and to serve in our military if required.

The process of becoming a U.S. citizen can take more than eight years, and nothing is guaranteed. So, immigrants have to make a real commitment to this country, and stick it out, to earn citizenship and its associated responsibilities.

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The last important point that President Bush makes is that we are a nation of immigrants, and we must honor the great tradition of the melting pot.

It is a false choice to think the immigration debate is a battle between America being a welcoming society and being a

nation of laws. We can be both because we are both.

The United States' ability to assimilate immigrants is our comparative advantage. Many countries today, such as Japan, China, Germany, and the United Kingdom, have declining populations. We can avoid this problem and build a vibrant, diverse country in part through immigration.

What we need now is leadership and reasonable compromise in the middle. We need to be talking about the right mix of immigration reform that addresses all the issues.

An immigration reform bill needs to be comprehensive, because all elements of this problem must be addressed together, or none of them will be solved at all.

I ask you to commit to comprehensive immigration reform. The longer we wait, the bigger the problems we are passing on to a future generation.

If we address these issues effectively, I'm convinced that our children and grandchildren will be proud of what we did.

Thank you. I would be pleased to answer your questions.