

Statement of
The Honorable Patrick Leahy

United States Senator
Vermont
May 11, 2010

Statement Of Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.),
Chairman, Senate Judiciary Committee,
Oversight Of U.S. Citizenship And Immigration Services
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I am glad to have Director Mayorkas with us today. We welcome him to his first appearance before the Judiciary Committee since his confirmation. The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) is a principal administrator of our immigration policy. It is charged with determining who is eligible for a wide range of visa categories. It ensures that those who are deemed eligible for an immigration benefit have not filed a fraudulent claim and do not wish to do us harm. The agency allows family members, foreign students, artists, athletes, and investors, among others, to enrich our economy and culture. And most significantly it makes it possible for immigrants to realize their dreams of U.S. citizenship. This agency is the face of our national immigration system. Its efficient administration of rules and standards is crucial to keeping our system strong and reliable.

The agency shoulders a tremendous responsibility, as do all of the men and women who adjudicate visa petitions. As Director, you are responsible for ensuring that a fee-funded agency provides a high quality service while doing everything possible to prevent fraud and abuse in the system. I am proud to say that Vermont is host to one of four national visa processing centers in the United States. The employees at the Vermont Service Center carry out their duties with conviction and tremendous care, and I want to recognize their excellent record.

I have long supported the EB-5 immigrant investor visa, and in particular the EB-5 Regional Center program. The EB-5 program brings significant amounts of capital to economically challenged regions of our country. Most importantly, this program creates jobs for Americans. Entrepreneurs in Vermont have used this program to revitalize businesses, with economic benefits and job creation across entire regions. I intend to introduce legislation soon to modernize this program. Among my priorities, I intend to make the program permanent. My bill will also ensure that as it grows, the program remains free from fraud or abuse.

The USCIS implements the United States' humanitarian policies. I commend your swift actions to implement Secretary Napolitano's announcement that the United States would grant temporary protected status (TPS) for Haitians after the recent earthquake. I hope that you are generously providing fee waivers for eligible TPS applicants. The agency also acted quickly to welcome Haitian orphans who were adopted by families in the United States. In this same spirit of

humanitarian aid, I worked with Senator Lugar on the Return of Talent Act. This bill would allow lawful permanent residents to return to their home countries to assist with reconstruction following a natural disaster or armed conflict, without penalizing a future application for citizenship. If enacted, this legislation could have a positive impact on Haiti's recovery.

Your agency also fulfills our country's historic commitment to refugees and asylum seekers by conducting interviews to determine eligibility for asylum. I recently introduced two bills, the Refugee Opportunity Act and the Refugee Protection Act, both of which strengthen United States' protections for asylees and refugees. These bills will ensure that America upholds its commitments under the Refugee Convention. I look forward to working with you on both pieces of legislation.

I am pleased you are with us today, and I look forward to your testimony and hearing about the recent successes and challenges at your agency.

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