

**Statement Of Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.),
Chairman, Senate Judiciary Committee,
Hearing On
Border Security, Economic Opportunity and Immigration Modernization Act, S.744
April 22, 2013**

We resumed hearings on comprehensive immigration reform legislation last Friday. Secretary Napolitano was scheduled to appear then but developments in Massachusetts required her appearance be postponed. She will return to the Committee tomorrow morning to discuss the legislative proposal before us.

Today's hearing is our fifth immigration hearing this year. It will add to the more than 40 hearings Senator Schumer, Senator Durbin, Senator Coons, Senator Hirono and I have chaired during the last few Congresses on these matters. On Friday, we received testimony about the economic impact of the bill. Today we will hear about how the bill will impact our farming, construction, service, and technology industries. We will hear the views of those who have long fought for immigration reform and those who oppose the proposal. We will hear from the religious community and the business community. We will hear from scholars, law enforcement, and advocates. We will also hear from witnesses who believe that equality for all under our immigration system is not only right, but in our Nation's interest.

It is long past time for us to reform our immigration system. We came close in 2006 when Senator Kennedy and Senator McCain led a bipartisan effort. In the course of those efforts, Senator Kennedy said the following:

We believe that immigrants, like women and African Americans before them, have rights in this country, and the time is ripe for a new civil rights moment. We believe that a nation of immigrants rejects its history and its heritage when millions of immigrants are confined forever to second-class status and that all Americans are debased by such a two-tier system. The time has come for comprehensive immigration reform.

Senator Kennedy was right. I wish the House of Representatives had joined in our efforts in 2006 and we had completed these reforms back then. I am glad that Senator McCain has once again joined this effort. It is long past time to get this done. We need an immigration system that lives up to American values and helps write the next great chapter in American history by reinvigorating our economy and enriching our communities.

In Vermont, immigration has promoted cultural richness through refugee resettlement and student exchange, economic development through the EB-5 Regional Center program, and tourism and trade with our friends in Canada. Foreign agricultural workers support Vermont's farmers and growers, and many have become a part of farm families that are woven into the fabric of Vermont's agricultural community. Among today's witnesses are two Vermonters who will talk about the needs of farmers and the challenges many face under the current system, and the way in which international tourism and trade is critical to border states like Vermont.

Late last week opponents of comprehensive immigration reform began to exploit the Boston Marathon bombing. I urge restraint in that regard. Refugees and asylum seekers have enriched the fabric of this country from our founding. In Vermont, we have welcomed as neighbors Bhutanese, Burmese, and Somalis, just as other states have welcomed immigrants looking to America for refuge and opportunity. Whether it is the Hmong in Minnesota, Vietnamese-Americans in California, Virginia and Texas, Cuban-Americans in Florida and New Jersey, or Iraqis in Utah, our history is full of these stories of salvation, and renewal.

Let no one be so cruel as to try to use the heinous acts of two young men last week to derail the dreams and futures of millions of hardworking people. The bill before us would serve to strengthen our national security by allowing us to focus our border security and enforcement efforts against those who would do us harm. But a Nation as strong as ours can welcome the oppressed and persecuted without making compromises on our security. We are capable of vigilance in our pursuit of these values.

The bipartisan effort behind the proposal we are examining today is the result of significant work and compromise. In addition to the eight bipartisan members who led the effort, I would also like to thank Senator Feinstein and Senator Hatch for their work on the provisions affecting agriculture. I want to urge everyone on both sides to consider their example as we move forward on this most important endeavor.

Too often in the recent past this Committee has broken along partisan lines on compelling issues. Recently we saw all Republican Senators on this Committee oppose reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act. Fortunately, with the help of half of the Republicans in the Senate we were able to enact that important legislation earlier this year. Last week, despite three Committee hearings, four mark ups and extensive negotiations, we saw all Republicans on this Committee oppose bipartisan efforts to close the gun show loophole and enact a tough law against gun trafficking and straw purchasing.

I do not want to see comprehensive immigration reform fall victim to entrenched, partisan opposition. The challenge now is ours in the Committee. Let us continue to work together to make this bill better, rather than making sure that nothing can get done.

The dysfunction in our current immigration system affects all of us. Now is our opportunity to create an immigration system worthy of American values.

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