



April 19, 2013

Mr. Patrick Leahy
Chairman
United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary
Washington, D.C.

Good morning, Mr. Chairman, and Members of the Committee. My name is Guillermo Vidal. I am here to lend support to the Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act of 2013.

I am the President and CEO of the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of Metro Denver, an organization of over 2000 business members.

Although I represent the business community today, I also bring over 36 years of experience as a public servant, holding several positions within the great city of Denver, Colorado including serving as the city's 44th and first foreign born mayor.

Before I served the state of Colorado for twenty three years in the Colorado Department of Transportation, the last five of which I held the post of Executive Director and part of a governor's cabinet.

I am a proud American, but I am also Cuban immigrant who, in 1961, at the tender age of 10, was sent by my parents to the United States with my two brothers as part of a program called Operation Peter Pan that brought 14,000 Cuban children to this country unaccompanied by their parents in order to save them from Castro's Cuba.

For this reason, my testimony today is rooted in everything that I am, everything that I have and everything that I have ever achieved as a result of the door that was opened to me the day I arrived in the United States.

My personal story represents two great truths about this country, First, that anyone regardless of the most humble beginnings can become anything they set their mind to, like the mayor of a large city or perhaps even greater,

Fifty two years ago I arrived in this country parentless and was sent to live in an orphanage in Pueblo, Colorado. Every day I woke up not knowing what suffering awaited me. Many nights I cried myself to sleep and asked a merciful God to take my life and spare me from the great sorrow I was experiencing.

Yet, here I am today testifying before you, the Senate Judiciary Committee.

But the second truth that my story represents is that immigrants make positive contributions to the success of this country daily, especially when they can live out of the shadows.



Immigrants built America. We came escaping the desperation of poverty, or to free ourselves from oppressive regimes that violated our human rights. We came in search of education and opportunity.

We chose a new destiny, the United States of America, a beacon of hope and promise of a brighter future, a place where all can live in freedom and contribute to the success of their communities.

Unfortunately, over the years, indecisiveness and lack of action on comprehensive immigration reform has resulted in a dysfunctional system that has confiscated the respect we once held for immigrants and replaced it with a fear and ignorance that has dehumanized these individuals to the point that they are looked down upon as human throwaways.

I am encouraged by the bi-partisan effort that emerged to craft this legislation, but after all my years in government developing public policy, I know that no legislation will ever be perfect enough to satisfy every nuance from all political sides.

But hopefully we can agree on one thing; fixing our immigration system will contribute to the greater good of our country by;

- securing our borders and providing a safe, fair and orderly process into this nation.
- giving a clear set of rules and realistic timeline for future immigrants to live and work here.
- providing legal status and a path to citizenship to undocumented immigrants already here so that they may openly contribute to our society.
- keeping families together,
- providing immigrant children who came here following the will of their parents a stable home and their own opportunity at the American dream.

This Comprehensive Immigration Reform will bring people out of the shadows to;

- Provide a skilled and dedicated workforce that will grow our economy.
- Invite entrepreneurialism and innovation that will create more businesses and jobs.
- Bring in new revenues in the form of taxes that will help us run our country and strengthen our government
- Bring out into the open a new group of consumers that will spur new business growth.



My parents made an unfathomably courageous sacrifice in sending their children to this country, and I am the better for it. My life has been filled with hope, opportunity, meaning and purpose. I am fulfilling my parents' American dream. But the America that I was sent to as a child would never have tolerated what many immigrants must live with today; living in fear of being deported or separated from their families, having their wages stolen by a deceitful employer, or having no legal recourse when crimes are committed against them.

The fabric of America will continue to change and we as leaders should be the positive facilitators of that change.

I ask you to support comprehensive immigration reform. Let's recover that greater good America once proudly displayed for the rest of the world.

Thank you and I can answer any questions.

Guillermo "Bill" Vidal