

TESTIMONY BY REPRESENTATIVE SILVESTRE REYES (TX-16)
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
BEFORE THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY
SUBCOMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION, CITIZENSHIP, REFUGEES,
BORDER SECURITY AND INTERNATIONAL LAW
APRIL 25, 2007

I would like to begin by thanking Chairwoman Zoe Lofgren and Ranking Member Peter King for holding this very important hearing today. As the lead Democratic cosponsor of H.R. 98, the Illegal Immigration Enforcement and Social Security Protection Act, I have been pleased to work with my friend and colleague from California, Mr. Dreier, on the bill, and I appreciate his leadership on this issue.

Before coming to Congress, I served for 26 ½ years in the U.S. Border Patrol. Half of the time I was a Border Patrol Sector Chief, first in McAllen, then in El Paso. As the only Member of Congress with a background in border enforcement, I have first-hand knowledge of what we need to do in order to reduce illegal immigration while keeping our borders and the nation safe.

I have always said that we need a comprehensive immigration reform plan with three main components: strengthened border security; earned legalization for those who qualify; and a guest worker program with tough employer sanctions. Comprehensive reform is like a three-legged stool. Without one leg, the stool topples.

I applaud the Committee for today's hearing and for gaining insight about one of the three components: the need for stricter employer sanctions. I have witnessed firsthand

the difference that tough employer sanctions can make in discouraging attempted illegal entries into the United States.

In 1986, the Immigration Reform and Control Act passed Congress and contained provisions which would penalize employers who hire illegal immigrants. After enactment, in parts of the country such as the border region where those of us in law enforcement had the resources to enforce those sanctions, there was a dramatic decrease in illegal entries into the United States. Clearly, once word got out that illegal immigrants were not being hired, the incentive to enter the United States was gone and attempted entries dropped off considerably.

H.R. 98 would expand and improve on the Immigration Reform and Control Act by enhancing the protection of Social Security cards and allowing employers to instantaneously verify a prospective employee's eligibility to work in the United States. The bill would also increase civil and criminal penalties for employers who hire illegal immigrants or fail to verify their employment eligibility.

If properly funded and with appropriate oversight and privacy protections, H.R. 98 would be an important step toward halting the flow of people seeking to enter the United States illegally in order to find employment. Our immigration and border security personnel will then be able to focus more of their time, effort, and resources on those who may be trying to enter the country to do us harm.

If we are really serious about enacting comprehensive immigration reform, we must include tough employer sanctions as one of the proposals within the final bill. Thank you for allowing me to testify on behalf of H.R. 98, and I look forward to continue to work with the Subcommittee in the future.