



# U.S. House of Representatives Committee on the Judiciary F. James Sensenbrenner, Jr., Chairman

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## *News Advisory*

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## **Sensenbrenner Opening Statement at San Diego Immigration Field Hearing**

WASHINGTON, D.C. – House Judiciary Committee Chairman F. James Sensenbrenner, Jr. (R-Wis.) delivered the following opening statement at today's immigration field hearing in San Diego:

Good afternoon. Today's hearing is the first in a series that the House of Representatives Committee on the Judiciary plans to hold throughout the months of August and September. Each hearing will examine a different aspect of our nation's illegal immigration dilemma, and also examine whether the Reid-Kennedy bill passed by the United States Senate offers a solution, or merely exacerbates the problem.

Today's hearing will focus on the impact that illegal immigration has on the pocketbooks of Americans, on the taxes that we all have to pay, and the benefits that the government can afford to give us. We will also examine whether the Reid-Kennedy bill's mass amnesty will cost us even more.

Most economists agree that illegal immigrants impose a net fiscal cost on American government and American taxpayers. This is not because they are illegal immigrants per se, nor does it indicate that illegal immigrants contribute nothing to our economy. Rather, illegal immigrants represent a net loss to the U.S. economy because they generally consume more in government benefits than they pay in taxes.

In recent years, scholars have attempted to precisely determine the fiscal burden of illegal immigrants. Of course, they can only offer estimates, but the results are astounding and troubling. Relying on data compiled by two of the best studies, one conducted by the National Research Council and one by the Center for Immigration Studies, it is conceivable that over their lifetimes, the estimated 12 million illegal immigrants residing in the U.S. today will cost American taxpayers over half a trillion dollars. This startling figure cannot and should not be ignored as Congress debates the future of U.S. immigration policy.

Certainly the largest single fiscal impact of illegal immigrants is the cost to taxpayers of educating their children, whether U.S. or foreign-born. The Supreme Court has ruled that absent clear instructions from Congress, local communities are not permitted to deny elementary and secondary education to illegal immigrant children. Nationwide, public education costs over \$7,700 per student per year. Most illegal immigrants with three young children are simply not going to pay enough in taxes each year to cover the \$23,000 cost of educating their children. Additionally, the contribution of illegal immigrants to overcrowding in America's schools is a growing problem across the United States.

Another huge fiscal drain is the cost of uncompensated health care for illegal immigrant families. The majority of illegal immigrants do not have health insurance. As a result, hospitals in the southwest border counties of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California alone incur costs of \$190 million per year for uncompensated emergency medical treatment of illegal immigrants. The California Hospital Association worries that care for illegal immigrants could force some hospitals into bankruptcy.

The law enforcement costs of illegal immigration are also substantial. Currently, 19% of inmates in federal prisons are noncitizens, and in 2003, California spent at least \$635 million for the incarceration of illegal immigrants.

Today's hearing will focus on the fiscal impact that could be expected if most of the illegal immigrants in America were to receive amnesty, as proposed by the Reid-Kennedy bill. While amnestied immigrants might be less likely to work off the books, it is absolutely essential that we recognize and carefully consider the fact that if legalized, they will also become eligible for many local, State and Federal welfare programs for which they are currently ineligible. In addition, under the Reid-Kennedy bill, they will be able to collect money from the Social Security Trust Fund based on the work they performed while here as illegal immigrants, placing further obligations on our already strained Social Security system.

In terms of the federal budget alone, the Center for Immigration Studies estimates that the cost to taxpayers of each illegal immigrant is currently over \$2,700 per year. CIS further estimates that the blow to American taxpayers will more than double – from \$10 billion to almost \$29 billion a year – should illegal immigrants receive amnesty. Other independent estimates indicate that the costs could be even higher.

While immigration is an emotional issue for millions of Americans, we cannot allow emotion alone to dictate the manner in which we respond to this pressing national issue. I believe that the American people expect and deserve Members of Congress to approach immigration policy in a thoughtful, factual, and responsible manner. We will not have met this obligation unless we seek to fully understand how our actions will affect the tax burden, and access to quality healthcare, education, and government services, of this generation and future generations of Americans. It is my hope that our hearing today will contribute to the extensive substantive examination that must inform this Committee's and Congress's consideration of these critical issues.

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