



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

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## ***News Advisory***

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Contact: Jeff Lungren/Terry Shawn  
202-225-2492

## **Statement of Chairman F. James Sensenbrenner, Jr. at the House Judiciary Field Hearing on Border Security and Immigration, El Paso, Texas**

El Paso, TX - House Judiciary Committee Chairman F. James Sensenbrenner, Jr. (R-Wis.) made the following statement at the Judiciary Committee's field hearing on border security and immigration at Chamizal National Memorial Park in El Paso, Texas today.

"Welcome to the House Judiciary Committee's second field hearing on the subject of illegal immigration. The purpose of this series of hearings is to examine the challenges our Nation currently faces with regard to illegal immigration and the impact that the Reid-Kennedy immigration bill, passed by the United States Senate, would have if it were to become law.

The Committee's first hearing examined the enormous costs illegal immigration imposes on American taxpayers and social services. A focus of today's hearing is the issue of whether the United States should be forced to *prospectively* consult with a foreign government when taking steps to strengthen the security of our borders – something section 117 of the Reid-Kennedy bill explicitly requires.

Today's hearing will also look at the social and fiscal consequences of large scale illegal immigration – such as drug smuggling, alien trafficking, and violent crime – in El Paso and the other cities and towns along the southwest border, and examine whether the Reid-Kennedy bill would address or merely compound these problems.

A nation's sovereignty is defined in part by the ability to control its borders. President Reagan once remarked that "a nation without borders is not really a nation." The United States has historically derived strength from its embrace of legal immigrants from all corners of the globe. However, as a sovereign nation, the U.S. must also maintain the sole power to determine who may enter its borders and under what conditions. When more than a half million individuals

enter the country illegally or fail to abide by their terms of entry on an annual basis, it not only erodes U.S. sovereignty, but presents a clear threat to American citizens in a post 9/11 world.

America's southern neighbor, Mexico, recognizes the importance of being able to control its borders and accordingly has very tough laws and practices to limit the entry of non-Mexicans into that country. One might question however, whether they respect the United States right to control its own borders. According to a New York Times article published on May 25<sup>th</sup> of this year, newly-elected President Felipe Calderon stated defiantly that "the more walls they build, the more walls we will jump."

If enacted, the Reid-Kennedy bill would require that before the U.S. can construct any additional fencing and related border security structures along our southern border, we must "consult" with federal, state, and local Mexican officials. This mandate in the Senate bill represents an unprecedented surrender of America's sovereignty. Moreover, it defies common sense to require that proposals to strengthen our border security be vetted by the same officials who have actively encouraged the exodus of their nationals across our southern border.

In addition to illegal immigrants who cross unprotected sectors of our southern border in search of improved economic conditions, the lack of a border fence allows those involved in drug trafficking and human smuggling operations, as well as other violent criminal aliens virtually unobstructed movement across the border. Despite the daily threat that this criminal element poses to cities and towns along the border, and the fact that local law enforcement officers are often outmanned and outgunned, they faithfully perform their duty to fight such criminal activity as best they can. As a result, there are so many criminal aliens in the jails of El Paso and other border towns that city budgets are strained to pay for their detention.

H.R. 4437, the House-passed immigration reform bill that I authored along with Peter King, Chairman of the Homeland Security Committee, authorizes \$100 million a year to help border community law enforcement agencies cope with the cost of crime committed by illegal immigrants and Mexican professional criminals. The Reid-Kennedy bill has no such provision.

Finally, the Reid-Kennedy bill would prohibit local sheriffs and police from assisting with the vast majority of immigration enforcement that is civil in nature. This would deprive local law enforcement of vital tools they need to govern their communities, and deny the Department of Homeland Security vital assistance it could otherwise count on in enforcing our immigration laws. H.R. 4437 takes the opposite, and better, approach of clarifying that local law enforcement can voluntarily assist in the enforcement of all our immigration laws.

I look forward to hearing from all our witnesses today on these important issues."

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