



Testimony of

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Subcommittee on Immigration, Citizenship, Refugees, Border Security,
and International Law**

Hearing on

The Ethical Imperative for Reform of Our Immigration System

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INTRODUCTION

Good morning, Chairwoman Lofgren, Ranking Member King, and members of the subcommittee. I am Dr. Richard Land, president of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission. As you are aware, the Southern Baptist Convention is the nation's largest non-Catholic denomination, with more than 16 million members worshipping in nearly 44,000 autonomous local congregations. The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission is the official Southern Baptist entity charged by the Southern Baptist Convention to speak to our nation's moral, cultural, and religious liberty issues. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this committee this morning from a faith-based perspective on comprehensive immigration reform.

The subcommittee is well aware that something must be done to address our current immigration situation. With an estimated 12 million men, women, and children living and working illegally in the United States, it is no less than a crisis. Despite the impasse in previous Congresses on immigration reform, our crisis is not insurmountable. Congress can and must devise a plan to bring these people out of the shadows. The more protracted the delay in action, the more severe the problem will become. Unfortunately, Congress has yet to write a bill on comprehensive immigration reform, appropriately addressing both enforcement of immigration law and the status of millions of people here illegally, that would garner support among most Southern Baptists and other Evangelicals.

SOUTHERN BAPTISTS AND IMMIGRATION REFORM

Like some other religious bodies, the Southern Baptist Convention has been vocal on the issue of immigration reform. In June 2006, the Southern Baptist Convention, gathered in Greensboro, N.C. for its annual meeting, passed a resolution¹ by a nearly unanimous vote, without debate, which called for enforcement of immigration laws balanced with compassion for those here illegally. The resolution "urge[s] the United States Congress to address seriously and swiftly the question of how to deal realistically with the immigration crisis in a way that will restore trust among the citizenry." Chief among the resolution's admonitions are calls for "the federal government to provide for the security of our nation by controlling and securing our borders" and "to enforce all immigration laws, including the laws directed at employers who knowingly hire illegal immigrants or who are unjustly paying these immigrants substandard wages or subjecting them to conditions that are contrary to the labor laws of our country."

Fundamentally, Southern Baptists and other Evangelicals view immigration through the lens of their faith. As citizens of the United States, we—meaning Southern Baptists—have an obligation to support the government and the government's laws for conscience's sake (Romans 13:7). We also have a right to expect the government to fulfill its divinely ordained mandate to punish those who break the laws and reward those who do not (Romans 13:1-7). But, Southern Baptists also recognize a biblical mandate to care for

¹ Southern Baptist Convention, Resolution "On the Crisis of Illegal Immigration," adopted June 14, 2006, available at <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/amResolution.asp?ID=1157> (See Appendix 1).

“the least of these among us” (Matthew 25:34-40), to care for the “strangers” who reside in our land (Leviticus 19:34; Hebrews 13:2), and to act justly and mercifully (Micah 6:8). Bearing this in mind, Southern Baptists pledged in the 2006 resolution to, among other things, “act redemptively and reach out to meet the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of all immigrants, to start English classes on a massive scale, and to encourage them toward a path of legal status and/or citizenship.”

Acts of mercy by the church have been and will remain insufficient to repair our broken immigration system. Nor is the church’s responsibility equivalent to the government’s. While Southern Baptists and other Evangelicals will do their part individually and collectively as churches to reach out to those here illegally, only a proper government response can resolve our immigration crisis.

THE CONTOURS OF COMPREHENSIVE IMMIGRATION REFORM

Over the last four years, the Southern Baptist Convention’s Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission has repeatedly called for comprehensive immigration reform. In April 2006, two months prior to the Southern Baptist Convention’s formal action on the issue, I laid out the parameters of a plan to address our immigration problem in a comprehensive manner. My holistic approach, published in *Baptist Press*, rests on three broad pillars that expand upon the Convention’s resolution: a secure border, enforcement of internal immigration laws, and a path to legal status and expanded guest-worker program.²

1. Border Security

Border security is a non-negotiable component of any successful immigration reform plan. Americans have a right to expect the federal government to enforce the laws regarding those who cross our borders. Border security is a question of national sovereignty, national security, and the government fulfilling its divinely mandated responsibility to enforce the law. Any successful consensus on how to address the immigration crisis must be built on the foundation of the federal government convincing the American people that it has committed the necessary resources to secure our borders. This does not mean closing our borders or installing continuous fences, but borders must be controlled. We need to know who comes in, who goes out, and who they are.

Under both Democratic and Republican administrations, the federal government has failed to fulfill its responsibility in this area, thereby fueling severe consternation among a sizable constituency of Americans and fostering the immigration crisis we face today.

² Richard Land, “FIRST PERSON: Immigration Crisis Requires Biblical Response,” *Baptist Press*, April 27, 2006, available at <http://www.bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?id=23137> (See Appendix 2); See also Richard Land, “Immigration Reform and the SBC,” *Baptist Press*, April 3, 2007, available at <http://www.bpnews.net/BPFirstPerson.asp?ID=25322> (See Appendix 3); Richard Land, “FIRST-PERSON: A Moral and Just Response to the Immigration Crisis,” *Baptist Press*, May 12, 2010, available at <http://www.bpnews.net/BPFirstPerson.asp?ID=32916> (See Appendix 4); and Richard Land and Barrett Duke, “Principles for Just Immigration Reform,” July 12, 2010 (See Appendix 5).

An unsecured border poses a direct threat to our national security. The September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on U.S. soil serve as a chilling reminder of our broken immigration system. We now know that the 19 al Qaeda terrorists who carried out the attacks evaded immigration laws and had been living in the United States for months, and some for more than a year, plotting the hijacking of four commercial airplanes to strike the World Trade Center buildings, the Pentagon, and the White House. As a result, nearly 3,000 innocent American lives were ruthlessly ended. Nine years later, the horrifying events of that day should give pause to every American.

Porous borders give terrorists and deported illegal immigrants who wish us harm relative ease of entry and reentry into the United States. In a post-9/11 world, a failure to control our borders only makes our nation more vulnerable to future attacks. The mere enactment of laws on border enforcement, however, will not suffice. Only a demonstrated commitment to secure our borders will gain Southern Baptists', as well as most Americans', trust.

2. Enforcement of Internal Immigration Laws

The second pillar of comprehensive immigration reform is a commitment by the federal government to enforce the laws within the country, which include cracking down on businesses that employ workers illegally. Here, too, the federal government has failed. Americans know the government is quite capable of enforcing laws that it truly wishes to enforce—the Internal Revenue Service comes to mind. The government is clearly culpable for not having the will to dedicate sufficient resources to enforce the laws at our borders and within the 50 states. That must change.

One useful means of cracking down on illegal workers has been the use of an electronic verification system. The E-Verify background check program, run by the Department of Homeland Security in conjunction with the Social Security Administration, enables employers to determine the eligibility of newly hired workers by entering their tax information into a free web-based database. This program, currently voluntary for most employers, should be reauthorized and made a mandatory part of the hiring process. Employers found in breach of hiring only those legally living in the U.S. should face stiff fines.

Moreover, lessons from previous congressional debates on immigration reform should not be forgotten. The American people, many Southern Baptists included, wanted a far more tangible commitment from the government that it would take border security and enforcement more seriously *first*. Only then would they give their support to any plan to resolve the issues surrounding the millions of immigrants who are already here illegally.

3. Path to Legal Status/Expanded Guest-Worker Program

The final pillar of comprehensive immigration reform is a program with multiple paths to legal status for illegal immigrants, including citizenship, a temporary worker program, and a permanent or temporary legal residency program. Some have asked, “Why not just

insist that all of the more than 12 million illegal immigrants go home?” The simple answer is that there is neither the political nor economic will in the U.S. population for forcibly rounding up 12 million people—many of whom have children who are American citizens—and shipping them back to their country of origin. As you know, politics and public policy are “the art of the possible.” The reality is that the United States is not going to deport 12 million people, whether one thinks we should or not.

Second, it would not be fair or right. We have sent at best a mixed message to undocumented workers for more than two decades. At the border, we have had two signs posted: “No Trespassing” and “Help Wanted.” Further, it is manifestly unfair to not enforce a law for more than two decades and then all of a sudden announce, now we are going to enforce retroactively laws that have been dormant in terms of enforcement.

For example, suppose the federal government sent out a notice saying, “We have been monitoring your habitual exceeding of the speed limits on our interstates over the past 20 years. Now, we have the technology to ticket you for each incidence of speeding over the last 20 years. You will be billed retroactively with 20 years worth of speeding tickets.” Does anyone think most Americans would find this either fair or acceptable? I think not.

Once the federal government has convinced the American people that it has the will and is committing the resources necessary to enforce its laws, then I believe a consensus can be built and will form around some type of program that would address the question of the illegal immigrants who are already in the United States.

Such a program must not involve any type of “amnesty” that would just forgive the illegal entry of people, and it must require that those who are in America illegally be placed behind those who have already applied for permanent legal status. This program would recognize that these illegal immigrants did break the law in order to come here and work. However, most of them have been hard-working, law-abiding residents since their arrival. Therefore, the program would, in effect, say to those who are here illegally: You have a one-time opportunity of perhaps one year to come forward and apply for legal status. If such immigrants could demonstrate that they have been employed, and have not broken the law since or before their illegal entry, they could apply for legal status to remain in the country.

Some critics, however, suggest that “comprehensive reform” is code for amnesty, but such action is not amnesty because it does not merely pardon an offender. My proposal requires lawbreakers to pay a fine, learn to read, write, and speak English, and follow a rigorous process for legal status. Penalties, probation, and requirements do not equal “amnesty.” Going to the back of the line behind those who have, and are trying, to come here legally is not amnesty. These are principles of justice and fairness that respect the rule of law and treat all parties involved (American citizens, legal immigrants, and illegal immigrants) with dignity.

Such a proposed program would also give employers a defined window (potentially six months to one year) to come forward, pay a fine, and come clean for past offenses. At the

end of the proposed period, the government then would tell illegal immigrants and their employers that if they haven't come forward and availed themselves of this generous and compassionate offer, "The government will find you, and if you're here illegally, deport you, and if you are a business, fine you in significant ways and perhaps prosecute you criminally."

While it is important to provide paths to legal status, we must be careful to avoid problems of chain migration—the process of bringing extended members of one's family to the United States once a family member is settled here. Limiting chain migration to immediate family members (spouses and natural/adopted children) would be an appropriate solution to this potential problem. Of course, hardship exceptions may be appropriate if a person's elderly parents have no means of support in their home countries. Such chain migration limitations will allow us to maintain our commitment to bringing in additional immigrants.

Also, since the government shouldn't reward illegal activity, it should establish an expanded guest-worker program for people not currently in the country, but who would like to come to the United States to work. The government could establish such a program with a ceiling of perhaps 350,000 people a year who could come to fill jobs that have been advertised in the United States by American employers for an adequate length of time and for which they have not been able to find employees domestically. These new guest workers would also have to agree to a background check and to learn English. Under such a proposed program, they could apply for permanent resident status at the end of four years, a shorter period than illegal immigrants would face for such status. In other words, those who have come here illegally go to the back of the line behind those who have tried, and are trying, to come to the U.S. legally. I believe most Americans would perceive such a program as a fair and practical way to deal with the over 12 million illegal immigrants currently in the country.

Coming forward and earning recognized legal status would have several advantages both for immigrants and for the nation. First, it would give the immigrants protection against exploitation by employers and by others in society who prey on them as vulnerable and legally defenseless.

Second, it would allow immigrants to go home and visit their families in their country of origin and then return to the United States. When you take the time to talk to undocumented workers, you find there is a significant minority (perhaps 30 percent) who do not wish to remain in the United States permanently or bring their families here. These individuals would welcome the opportunity to be guest workers and be able to send money home to and visit their families in their home countries without fear of not being able to get back into the United States.

Third, greatly expanding the program for new guest workers would make the job of border enforcement easier. If immigrants have a meaningful, legal pathway to cross the border, there will be less temptation to enter illegally and less opportunity to remain here illegally, and the number of people attempting illegal entry would drop.

I believe a majority of Americans would support such a program that would constitute real border enforcement, enforcement of existing laws within our borders, and a fair and compassionate way to address the crisis of the 12 million illegal immigrants already here.

I would also like to add that any immigration reform plan must be sensitive to the calling faith communities feel to engage in human needs ministry. The potential impact on human needs ministry is an area of immigration reform that uniquely affects the faith community. Christians have a divine mandate to care for those in need and to give a cup of cold water in Jesus' name (Matthew 10:42). The story of the Good Samaritan also informs our spiritual obligation to reach out to those in need of assistance (Luke 10:30-37). Our government should not criminalize private citizens who give a cup of cold water, a hot meal, a warm bed or medical assistance to those who are in our country illegally. The legislation proposed in a previous Congress, for example, included no such exemption for charitable and Christian activity toward all people, regardless of their residency status. I do not, nor do most Evangelicals, support the practice of providing sanctuary to those who are here illegally, but most Evangelicals do support the practice of meeting the basic human needs of people who are here.

CONCLUSION

Part of the United States' greatness is rooted in its history of immigration. The United States is a nation of immigrants. With few exceptions, such as Native Americans, every citizen of this nation who did not personally immigrate here claims U.S. citizenship as a result of his or her ancestors' immigration. Over the last four centuries, people have left their homelands with sights set on the United States for several reasons—some in pursuit of economic fortune, while others, like my Baptist forefathers, for religious freedom. Yet their dreams share a common theme: hope for a better life than offered in their native land.

From Anglo-Saxons to Africans to Asians and countless ethnic groups in between, America's strength lies in her rich diversity. Our diversity should be not only celebrated but expanded upon. We have also drawn some of the brightest minds in such fields as science, engineering, and medicine. We need to maintain a welcoming approach to immigration to help the United States retain its longstanding position as a technological superpower.

I believe that a majority of Americans would support a plan that follows the contours I have laid out—one that is not merely labeled comprehensive, but actually offers comprehensive reform—and that Congress can likewise reach consensus. Even beyond the lines of religious persuasion or identification, I believe comprehensive immigration reform is a solution that is best for all Americans.

The architectural blueprint and the building materials for a successful consensus on comprehensive immigration reform are present in American society today. What is needed to bring that potential edifice to fruition? Statesmanship. Churchill once said that

politicians think about the next election, while statesmen focus on the next generation. We need statesmen who will put aside short-term perceived partisan advantage and bring the consensus to fruition.

Once again, I appreciate the opportunity to share before the subcommittee a comprehensive immigration reform proposal formulated from a faith-based perspective. I, and millions of other Southern Baptists, look forward to supporting a plan on immigration that both elevates trust in the rule of law and its implementation and treats our fellow members of the human race with dignity and respect. I thank you for your time, Madam Chair.



ON THE CRISIS OF ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION **Southern Baptist Convention**

June 2006

WHEREAS, The crisis of illegal immigration in the United States impacts tens of millions of people in many different ways; and

WHEREAS, Christians have responsibilities in two realms: as citizens of the nation (Matthew 22:21) and as citizens of the heavenly Kingdom (Philippians 3:20; Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 2:9); and

WHEREAS, As citizens of the nation, Christians are under biblical mandate to respect the divine institution of government and its just laws, but at the same time, Christians have a right to expect the government to fulfill its ordained mandate to enforce those laws (Romans 13:1-7); and

WHEREAS, As citizens of the heavenly Kingdom and members of local congregations of that Kingdom, we also have a biblical mandate to act compassionately toward those who are in need (Matthew 25:34-40), love our neighbors as ourselves (Matthew 22:39), and to do unto others as we would have them do unto us (Matthew 7:12); and

WHEREAS, The federal government's failure to fulfill its responsibility in the area of illegal immigration, during both Democratic and Republican administrations, has caused severe consternation among a sizable constituency of Americans and has led to the crisis we now face; and

WHEREAS, The federal government has not only failed to control the borders but failed in its responsibility to enforce the immigration laws, not only with regard to the individuals who are here illegally, but also with regard to the employers who knowingly hire them; and

WHEREAS, There are reportedly 12 million immigrants and counting who are living and working in America without legal status, many of whom have children who are American citizens by birth; and

WHEREAS, Many of these hardworking and otherwise law-abiding immigrants have been exploited by employers and by others in society, contrary to James 5:4; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention meeting in Greensboro, North Carolina, June 13-14, 2006, urge the federal government to provide for the security of our nation by controlling and securing our borders; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we urge the United States Congress to address seriously and swiftly the question of how to deal realistically with the immigration crisis in a way that will

restore trust among the citizenry; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we urge the federal government to enforce all immigration laws, including the laws directed at employers who knowingly hire illegal immigrants or who are unjustly paying these immigrants substandard wages or subjecting them to conditions that are contrary to the labor laws of our country; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we urge citizen Christians to follow the biblical principle of caring for the foreigners among us (Deuteronomy 24:17-22) and the command of Christ to be a neighbor to those in need of assistance (Luke 10:30-37), regardless of their racial or ethnic background, country of origin, or legal status; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we encourage Christian churches to act redemptively and reach out to meet the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of all immigrants, to start English classes on a massive scale, and to encourage them toward the path of legal status and/or citizenship; and be it finally

RESOLVED, That we encourage all Southern Baptists to make the most of the tremendous opportunity for evangelism and join our Master on His mission to seek and save those who are lost (Luke 19:10) among the immigrant population to the end that these individuals might become both legal residents of the United States and loyal citizens of the Kingdom of God.

Greensboro, NC



FIRST-PERSON: Immigration crisis requires biblical response

By Richard Land

Apr 27, 2006

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--The immigration crisis in the United States is a huge issue, impacting tens of millions of people in many different ways. How do we approach this problem? First, we have to identify "we." When I speak of "we," I am referring to Southern Baptists and other evangelical Christians who are American citizens. As such, we have responsibilities in two realms: as citizens of the nation and as citizens of the heavenly Kingdom (Philippians 3:20; Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 2:9).



As citizens of the United States, we have an obligation to support the government and the government's laws for conscience' sake (Romans 13:7). We also have a right to expect the government to fulfill its divinely ordained mandate to punish those who break the laws and reward those who do not (Romans 13:1-7). As citizens of the Lord's heavenly Kingdom and members of local colonies of that Kingdom (congregations of Christians), we also have a divine mandate to act redemptively and compassionately toward those who are in need. Jesus commanded us to love our neighbors as ourselves (Matthew 22:39) and to do unto others as we would have them do unto us (Matthew 7:12). How do these twin divine mandates apply to the immigration crisis facing our nation?

First, as citizens of the nation, we have a right to expect the federal government to enforce the laws regarding who may cross our borders. Border security is a question of national sovereignty, national security and the government fulfilling its divinely mandated responsibility to enforce the law.

Any successful consensus on how to address the immigration crisis must be built on the foundation of the federal government convincing the American people that it is willing to commit whatever resources are necessary to secure our borders. This does not mean closing the borders, but having effective control over who comes in, who goes out, and who they are.

The federal government's disgraceful failure to fulfill its responsibility in this area, during both Democratic and Republican administrations, has caused severe consternation among a sizable constituency of Americans and has led to the immigration crisis we face. There are at least 12 million people living and working in our country who have come here illegally, and our federal government has no idea who they are and how long they have been here.

In addition to not controlling our borders, the federal government has failed in its responsibility to enforce the laws within the country by not cracking down on businesses that employ illegal workers and by not enforcing immigration laws internally.

Americans know the federal government is quite capable of enforcing laws that it truly wishes to enforce -- the Internal Revenue Service comes to mind. The government is clearly culpable for not having the will to dedicate sufficient resources to enforce its laws at our borders or within the 50 states. That must change.

Some will ask, "Why not just insist that all of the more than 12 million illegal immigrants go

home?" The simple answer is that there is neither the political nor economic will in the U.S. population for forcibly rounding up 12 million people -- many of them who have children who are America citizens -- and shipping them back to their country of origin. Politics and public policy are the "art of the possible." The reality is that the United States is not going to deport 12 million people, whether you think we should or not.

Once the federal government has convinced the American people that it has the will and is committing the resources necessary to enforce its laws, then I believe a consensus can be built and will form around some type of "guest-worker" program that would address the question of the illegal immigrants who are already in the United States.

What would the contours of such a program look like? First, it must not involve any type of "amnesty" that would just forgive the illegal entry of people. It would recognize that these people did break the law in order to come here and work. Most of them have been hard-working, law-abiding residents since their arrival.

Such a "guest-worker" program would, in effect, say to those who are here illegally: You have a one-time opportunity of six months to come forward and apply for a "guest-worker" status, agree to undergo a criminal background check and agree to learn English. If such workers could demonstrate that they have been employed, and have not broken the law since or before their illegal entry, they could pay a fine and agree to pay any back taxes owed. After a certain number of years -- depending on how long they have already been here -- they could apply for permanent resident status.

For example, if someone had been here 10 years, they might be on probationary "guest-worker" status for five years. Someone who had been here five years would have a "guest-worker" status for six years.

Such a proposed "guest-worker" program would also give employers a six-month window to come forward, pay a fine and come clean for past offenses. At the end of the proposed six-month period, the government then would tell illegal immigrants and their employers that if they haven't come forward and availed themselves of this generous and compassionate offer, "The government will find you and if you're here illegally, deport you and if you are a business, fine you in significant ways, and perhaps prosecute you criminally."

Also, since the government shouldn't reward illegal activity, it should establish an expanded "guest-worker" program for people not currently in the country, but who would like to come to the United States to work. The government could establish such a program with a ceiling of, perhaps 350,000 people a year who could come to fill jobs that have been advertised in the United States by American employers for an adequate length of time and for which they have not been able to find employees domestically. These new "guest workers" would also have to agree to a background check and to learn English. Under such a proposed program, they could apply for permanent resident status at the end of four years, a shorter period than illegal immigrants would face for such status. In other words, those who have come here illegally go to the back of line behind those who come here legally. I believe most American would perceive such a program as a fair and practical way to deal with the over 12 million illegal immigrants currently in the country.

Coming forward and receiving recognized "guest-worker" status would have several advantages both for the workers and for the nation.

First, it would give the "guest workers" protection against exploitation by employers and by others in society who prey on them as vulnerable and legally defenseless.

Second, it would allow such workers to go home and visit their families in their country of origin and then return to their jobs in the United States. When you take the time to talk to illegal immigrants, you find there is a significant minority who do not wish to remain in the United States permanently or bring their families here. These individuals would welcome the opportunity

to be “guest workers,” able to send money home to, and visit their families in, their home countries without fear of not being able to get back into the United States.

Third, greatly expanding the program for new “guest workers” would make the job of border enforcement easier. If immigrants have a meaningful, legal pathway to cross the border, there will be less temptation to enter illegally and less opportunity to remain here illegally, and the number of people attempting illegal entry would drop.

I believe a majority of Americans would support such a dual program that would constitute real border enforcement, coupled with a fair and compassionate way to address the crisis of the 12 million illegal immigrants already here.

Now, what about our responsibilities as citizens of the heavenly Kingdom? Christians have a divine mandate to care for those in need and to give a cup of cold water in Jesus’ name (Matthew 10:42). The story of the Good Samaritan also informs our spiritual obligation to reach out to those in need of assistance (Luke 10:30-37). Our government should not criminalize private citizens who give a cup of cold water, a hot meal, a warm bed or medical assistance to those who are in our country illegally. The legislation by Rep. James Sensenbrenner, R.-Wis., must be amended to carve out an exemption for charitable and Christian activity toward all people.

Christian churches should be reaching out to meet the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of these “guest workers,” old and new. While the government must insist on the enforcement of the law and a probationary period and fines for those who have broken the law, Christians are mandated to forgive and to act redemptively within their communities toward all people, including illegal immigrants. Churches should start classes on a massive scale to help illegal-immigrants-turned-“guest-workers” learn English and help them acclimate to life in the United States.

Finally, a word to those who are here illegally or who wish to come as legal immigrants in the future. We are a nation of immigrants. Unless you are Native American, we all are immigrants, or the descendents of immigrants, and while all of our immigrant ancestors were proud of their heritage in their country of origin, they came to this country to become Americans. In reality, we are a nation of settlers, who came to “settle” in a new country. While society has days upon which Irish-Americans, Italian-Americans, Polish-Americans, and Anglo-Americans pay homage to their ancestors, these groups put their emphasis on the American part of the hyphenated term. If you are coming here to start a new life in a new country, the United States, rather than just coming here for a sojourn as a “guest worker” planning to return home someday, let’s display more American flags and a lot fewer flags of your country of origin. In other words, if you came here to start a new life in a new country, then put the emphasis on the American half of Hispanic-American, for example, and you are welcome.

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Richard Land is president of the Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission.

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Immigration reform and the SBC

By Richard Land

Apr 3, 2007

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--News reports in both the national print and electronic media have unfortunately sown some confusion over where Southern Baptists, and I, stand on the question of immigration reform.

Like most Americans, Southern Baptists and other evangelicals continue to search for a morally responsible way to address the growing immigration crisis while honoring the rule of law.

To date, legislation offering truly comprehensive immigration reform -- legislation that will garner the support of a critical mass of Southern Baptists and other evangelicals -- has yet to be written and introduced in Congress.

Immigration reform that is "truly" comprehensive and will earn my support will square with the points covered in a resolution overwhelmingly adopted by Southern Baptists' elected messengers meeting at their annual convention in June 2006.



The reform would:

- Insure the federal government provides for U.S. security "by controlling and securing our borders";
- Enforce immigration laws, including oversight of the hiring practices of private employers;
- Deal judiciously and "realistically" with those in the country illegally; and,
- Allow the people of God to act "redemptively," reaching out to meet the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of all immigrants as they work toward an earned pathway of "legal status and/or citizenship."

If I were a U.S. Congressman or Senator, I would not support any immigration bill that has been introduced. Each of the bills falls short in some critical areas.

Senate measures have been too lenient and have not adequately addressed border security. The House bill, which gained passage in the last session, was inadequate in that it focused almost exclusively on border security and failed to position the government to deal "realistically with the immigration crisis in a way that would restore trust among the citizenry," as the SBC resolution urges.

The legislation that will generate majority support among Southern Baptists and other evangelicals is still out there waiting to be written and introduced in the Congress.

It is imperative that Congress -- consistent with national sovereignty and with our national security -- expeditiously find a way to resolve this moral problem in a moral way in line with the ideals of our nation.

I am in favor of a measure that includes controlling the borders and enforcing immigration laws inside the country, while offering no amnesty for lawbreakers. This is my position and the position that emerges from any fair and objective reading of the SBC resolution.

The term "comprehensive legislation" is not code for amnesty, no matter what my critics contend. Webster defines amnesty as the "act of an authority (as a government) by which pardon is granted to a large group of individuals." Amnesty is wiping a transgressor's record clean -- it is a free ride.

Proper reform should consist of a "guest-worker" program that requires an illegal immigrant to undergo a criminal background check, pay a fine, agree to pay back taxes, learn English and get in line behind those who have legally migrated into this country in order to apply for permanent residence after a probationary period of years. Amnesty? Hardly.

To call any proposed requirement -- that individuals must learn to read and write and speak English and go through a rigorous process in order to earn their way out of a lengthy period of "probation" in order to apply for legal status -- "amnesty" is to do violence to the English language.

One must not only learn how to read, write and speak English properly; one must use the language as it was intended. Words have agreed upon meanings. One cannot change the meanings of words arbitrarily. Penalties, probation, and requirements do not equal "amnesty."

My position and the position of most Southern Baptists with whom I have spoken on this issue embraces the thought that if these immigrants choose to travel on a "path of legal status and/or citizenship," it must include certain financial, time, and other requirements. Amnesty? Hardly.

As reflected in the resolution on immigration that was overwhelmingly adopted at the Southern Baptist Convention meeting last June in Greensboro, N.C., and as I said in a press conference March 29 in Washington, D.C., on the topic of immigration, Southern Baptists will not embrace reform that is not committed to securing the borders.

As U.S. citizens, we have a right to expect the federal government to enforce the laws regarding who crosses our borders. Border security is a question of national sovereignty, national security and the government fulfilling its divinely mandated responsibility to enforce the law (Romans 13:1-7).

While the government focuses on enforcing the law, Christians are mandated to forgive and to act redemptively within their communities toward all people, including illegal immigrants. As citizens of the Lord's heavenly Kingdom, we have a divine mandate to respond compassionately toward those who are in need.

At the March 29 press conference, I not only cited extensively the SBC resolution on the immigration crisis, I also handed out copies of a first-person commentary on the issue that was published in Baptist Press in March 2006, well prior to the convention's adoption of the resolution in June of that year.

I was asked by a USA Today reporter following that press conference if my position on this issue was not somewhat ahead of where "some" of the people in the pew were. I agreed that I might be "a little bit ahead" of where some Southern Baptists are vis-à-vis this issue, but I noted voting messengers at the Southern Baptist Convention adopted the resolution on the immigration crisis with near unanimity and with no debate.

For the record, I did not say, and did not acknowledge, that I was "a little bit ahead" of where the convention was. In fact, I was at the press conference representing what the convention had said on the issue.

Once again I am reminded that it is usually far better to speak for yourself than to leave it to

others to write about what you supposedly said.

If I were in Congress I would look to the SBC resolution on immigration reform as a blueprint and plumb line for writing truly comprehensive immigration reform. None of the legislation currently being proposed or considered in the Congress comes anywhere close to rising to the standard set by our convention's messengers last June.

I remain determined to do my best to ensure that Southern Baptists and I are not misunderstood on this critical issue, in spite of how we are sometimes portrayed in the mainstream media. To understand better Southern Baptists' views on this issue, I urge you to look to our website, www.erc.com, and Baptist Press, and not rely solely on national press reports.

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Richard Land is president of the Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission.

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FIRST-PERSON: A moral and just response to the immigration crisis

By Richard Land
May 12, 2010

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--The time has come for our nation to resolve its immigration crisis. It is imperative that we find an acceptable solution to the plight of the millions of undocumented immigrants living in our nation. Currently, the two extremes of deportation or amnesty are being played against each other, resulting in a stalemate in Congress and growing frustration and division in society.

The recent passage of the new law in Arizona is a cry for help from the citizens of a state made desperate by the federal government's shameful and flagrant dereliction to its duty to control the nation's borders and to enforce its laws. This is manifestly a federal responsibility and the U.S. government has failed in its responsibilities to its citizens under both Democratic and Republican administrations.



The Arizona law is a symptom, not a solution. While I sympathize with the plight of the beleaguered citizens of Arizona, the law they have passed faces severe challenges. Attorneys I trust and respect tell me that if the law survives the manifold court challenges it faces and goes into effect, it will be abused by genuinely bad people (like drug dealers and human traffickers) whose unscrupulous lawyers will claim falsely that they were victims of racial profiling and prejudice when they were arrested legitimately.

Neither of the extreme solutions of deportation or amnesty are appropriate, workable solutions. To force those who are here illegally to leave is neither politically viable nor humanitarian. To offer "amnesty" to those who broke the immigration laws of our country is disrespectful of the rule of law. What is needed is a solution that respects the rule of law while at the same time treats undocumented immigrants compassionately.

As Christians, we must think through the question of illegal immigration not only as concerned citizens, but also as compassionate Christians. As citizens of the United States we have a right to expect the government to fulfill its divinely ordained mandate to punish those who break the law and to reward those who do not (Romans 13:1-7).

As citizens of the heavenly kingdom (the church), we also have a divine mandate to act redemptively and compassionately toward those in need. Jesus commanded us to love our neighbors as ourselves (Matthew 22:39) and to do unto others as we would have them do unto us (Matthew 7:12). Our Lord instructed His followers to meet the needs of those who are suffering (Matthew 25:31-36). The writer of the Book of Hebrews instructed his readers to "show hospitality to strangers" (Hebrews 13:2).

As U.S. citizens we have a right to expect the federal government to enforce the laws regarding who may cross our borders. Border security is a question of national security, domestic safety and tranquility, and the federal government fulfilling its divinely mandated responsibilities to enforce the law.

As people of faith we must lead our churches to engage in multi-faceted human needs ministries on a massive scale to meet the physical and spiritual needs of millions of men, women and children living in the shadows of society where they are exploited by the unscrupulous and victimized by predators.

As citizens, we also have a responsibility to help our nation respond to the plight of these millions of people in a manner that respects their innate dignity and humanity. The millions of undocumented workers living among us suffer as outcasts without the full protections of the law or full access to the opportunities this nation offers to all to fulfill their God-given potential.

It is imperative that the U.S. Congress -- consistent with national sovereignty and national security -- expeditiously find a way to resolve this moral problem in ways that are consistent with our national ideals.

I favor a measure that includes controlling the borders and enforcing immigration laws inside the country first, while offering no amnesty for lawbreakers. This is my position and the position that emerges from any fair and objective reading of a resolution on immigration that Southern Baptists adopted at their annual convention in June 2006.

The resolution calls on the federal government "to address seriously and swiftly the question of how to deal realistically with the immigration crisis in a way that will restore trust among the citizenry."

It also stresses that it is the government's obligation "to enforce all immigration laws, including the laws directed at employers who knowingly hire illegal immigrants or who are unjustly paying these immigrants substandard wages or subjecting them to conditions that are contrary to the labor laws of our country."

Proper reform should consist of a program that provides an earned pathway that requires an illegal immigrant who desires to remain legally in the U.S. to undergo a criminal background check, pay a fine, agree to pay back taxes, learn to speak, write, and read English and get in line behind those who are legally migrating into this country in order to apply for permanent residence after a probationary period of years. They must also acknowledge and pledge allegiance to America's governmental structure, the duties of citizenship and our core values as embodied in the Declaration of Independence. People who fail background checks or who refuse to comply with this generous opportunity to earn legal status, should be deported immediately.

This is not amnesty. Amnesty is what President Carter gave the draft dodgers who came home from Canada with no penalties, no fines, and no requirements whatsoever.

It should be remembered that most of these undocumented workers who have broken the law (and thus should be penalized) came here in order to work whereas most of our home-grown criminals break the law in order to avoid work.

While the government focuses on enforcing the law, Christians are mandated to forgive and reflect God's grace toward all people within their communities, including illegal immigrants. The recent SBC resolution encouraged "churches to act redemptively and reach out to meet the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of all immigrants."

As citizens of the Lord's heavenly Kingdom, we have a divine mandate to respond compassionately toward those who are in need.

There is neither the political nor economic will in the U.S. population for forcibly rounding up 12 million people -- many of them who have children who are American citizens -- and shipping them back to their country of origin. Politics and public policy are the "art of the possible." The reality is that it is not feasible for the United States government to attempt to deport 12 million people. There has to be another way to resolve this issue.

In hopes of providing a biblical solution to this matter, I have joined with other evangelicals in calling for bipartisan immigration reform that:

- Respects the God-given dignity of every person;
- Protects the unity of the immediate family;
- Respects the rule of law;
- Guarantees secure national borders;
- Ensures fairness to taxpayers; and,
- Establishes a path toward legal status and/or citizenship for those who qualify and who wish to become permanent residents.

The reality is that we have been, and are, a nation of immigrant settlers, and the descendents of such settlers, who braved oceans and many obstacles to come to this matchless land of opportunity to become Americans. Whether our ancestors came early, or late, we are Americans, whatever nationality may be used to describe our heritage before we arrived. We should, and we will, always have room in this great nation for those who are willing to embrace the American dream and the American ideals that both inspired that dream and define it.

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Principles for Just Immigration Reform

The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission
Southern Baptist Convention

by

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&

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The time has come for our nation to resolve its immigration dilemma. It is imperative that we find an acceptable solution to the disposition of the millions of undocumented immigrants living in our nation. Currently, the two extremes of deportation and amnesty are being played against each other, resulting in a stalemate in Congress. We believe that neither of the two extremes are appropriate, workable solutions. To force those who are here illegally to leave is neither politically viable nor humanitarian. To offer blanket amnesty to those who broke the immigration laws of our country and their own countries is disrespectful of the rule of law. What is needed is a solution that respects the rule of law while at the same time treats undocumented immigrants in the nation compassionately.

As Christians, we acknowledge that we must think through the question of illegal immigration not only as offended, concerned citizens, but also as compassionate Christians. The Church has a duty to minister to all people in need. Jesus instructed His followers to love all men, even those who hate them (see Luke 6:27-38). He instructed His followers to meet the needs of those who are suffering (Matthew 25:31-46). The writer of the Book of Hebrews instructed his readers to “show hospitality to strangers” (Hebrews 13:2).

While we reject the law-breaking practices of the so-called Sanctuary Movement, we recognize that the undocumented immigrants in our midst are in need of our ministry. We acknowledge a two-fold responsibility in this regard. As Christians we must lead the church to engage in multi-faceted, human needs ministry on a massive scale to meet the great spiritual and physical needs of millions of men, women, and children living in the shadows of society. Since they are bearers of the image of God, fellow members of the human race, and people for whom Jesus died we can do no less for them. We pledge to help our churches develop these ministries.

As citizens, we also have a responsibility to help our nation respond to the plight of these millions of people in a manner that respects their dignity and value as well. This document is our effort to help our nation address the plight of the millions of human beings living here illegally. Their current experience is neither good for them or for our nation. They suffer as outcasts, without access to all this country has to offer to empower them to fulfill their God-given potential. Our nation suffers as it reels under the division caused by their dilemma and by the loss of their vast capacity to contribute more fully to the life of our nation.

As Christian citizens, we believe God has something to say to us about how our nation deals with this issue. We have turned to the Bible for spiritual principles to guide our thinking and policy suggestions. The result of that search has brought us to the place where we believe our nation must think about immigration from the perspective of justice. The kind of justice we are talking about, however, considers the impact of decisions from the perspective of all parties affected. We

believe that God sought to teach Israel to think about justice in this way as well. He told His people, "You shall do no injustice in judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor nor defer to the great, but you are to judge your neighbor fairly" (Leviticus 19:15).

In our thinking about immigration policy, we believe the Old Testament provides some very clear guidance about how a nation should treat those who come to live within its borders. The Old Testament has two principal words, one mainly positive or neutral in its perspective and the other mainly negative, to refer to non-citizens living within the nation of Israel. The primary positive word is *ger*, commonly translated as "stranger" or "alien." The term speaks principally of one's civil standing. It refers to someone who has no inherited civil rights. In other words this person is not a citizen by birth. He has not inherited through any genetic relationship the rights and privileges of the descendants of Jacob who entered into covenant with God at Mount Sinai. Despite this lack of family connection, God gave many explicit instructions about appropriate treatment of these "aliens" or "strangers."

The Old Testament uses a different term to speak about non-Israelites from a negative perspective. In these instances, it typically uses the Hebrew term *nokri*, often translated as "foreign" or "foreigner." This is the term used in Ezra 10 and Nehemiah 13 to speak of the "foreign women" or "foreign wives" some of the Jewish men in post-exilic Israel had married (e.g., Ezra 10:10, 17, 44; Nehemiah 13:23-27). Nehemiah also used the term to refer to the "foreign women" Solomon married who led him astray. It also refers to the "foreign" things Nehemiah removed from Israel (see v. 30). In these instances, the concern is clearly with threats to the cultural or religious purity of Israel. It appears, then, that the Old Testament distinguishes between non-Israelites who are not a threat to the spiritual or cultural vitality of the nation and those who are. In this context, the *ger* is welcomed; the *nokri* is not.

When we bring this Old Testament perspective together with our nation's historic attitude toward immigration, it is clear that we should think of the undocumented immigrants in our nation as *ger* (i.e., positively) not *nokri* (i.e., negatively). It would be inappropriate to think of them from either a theological or cultural perspective. Given that the United States is not a theocracy, nor does it apply a theological test for entrance into our nation or for citizenship, we should not apply a theological test to immigrants. Furthermore, our nation has not stated that cultural similarity is a prerequisite for immigration. Indeed, if cultural difference were used as a criterion for denying entrance into the United States, most of the world's peoples would not be candidates for admittance. Of course, a nation has a right to expect that those who enter its borders would not seek to undermine its culture, and that those who seek citizenship would adopt its core cultural values. Rather than taking a negative attitude toward the vast majority of undocumented immigrants in our nation, there is plenty of reason to take a positive perspective toward them. The majority of them have proven their desire to work hard, provide for their families, and obey the law, except of course for immigration law. The main point is that the majority of these immigrants have proven their desire to live among us in peace.

If God instructed His covenant people to make careful distinctions between people in their midst, we would be wise to do the same. We acknowledge that the United States is not Israel. The nation of Israel was a theocracy. Its civil and religious components were intermingled. Many of God's instructions were intended to help the Israelites maintain religious purity. God has not structured any other nation in this way. Therefore, the United States is not obligated to adopt the civil laws God laid down specifically and uniquely for Israel. Nevertheless, we acknowledge that these laws often reflect universal principles that God expects any nation to honor. Indeed, we find the New Testament, including many statements by Jesus, often reiterating and reapplying these principles to a broader context.

As we have sought biblical guidance on how to address our nation's current immigration dilemma, we believe some core biblical values speak clearly. The recurrence of these values in the teachings of Jesus, assure us that they transcend Israelite national polity and are indeed universal in scope. The values we identify below apply to the civil relationships between any

people living together in community, and so they apply in our nation's context. Regarding the undocumented immigrant, we urge our nation to take the following core Biblical values into consideration.

- Neighbor love. God told the Israelites, "The stranger (*ger*) who resides with you shall be as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself" (Leviticus 19:34). He instructed them, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18). Jesus taught that everyone is our neighbor (Luke 10:25-37).
- Compassion and mercy. We should treat the weak and vulnerable with kindness (Micah 6:8, Malachi 3:5-6, Matthew 12:7).
- Provision. Finding ways to meet the needs of others is a core Christian value (Leviticus 23:22, Matthew 25:31-46).
- Dignity. God said, "You shall not wrong a stranger (*ger*) or oppress him" (Exodus 22:21). We are to "do justice" (Micah 6:8). We should treat all people as persons of worth and treat them in a way that respects their status as bearers of God's image. This is the essence of the Golden Rule (Matthew 7:12).

The issue of immigration must also be considered from the perspective of the core values of the welcoming nation. God ordained civil government (Romans 13:1-7). He charged it with the responsibility of providing for the security, wellbeing, and protection of the people under its authority. As such, the civil authority has a responsibility to assure that its policies honor this charge from God. From this perspective, we must consider the following core values, at a minimum.

- Constitutional obligations. Citizens have a right to expect the civil authority to fulfill its constitutional obligations.
- Covenantal obligations. The civil authority has a responsibility to make sure that its citizens are free to pursue the blessings of life, liberty, and happiness.
- Fiduciary obligations. A civil authority should not take on more financial obligations than the citizens can afford. Everyone suffers if a nation experiences financial collapse.
- Cultural obligations. Nations tend to thrive when the citizens share a certain set of core cultural values. These values should be honored and followed by incoming people to help maintain the values of the welcoming nation. In America's case those core values are embodied in the Declaration of Independence.

While we are certain that many details must be addressed, we offer below what we consider to be the primary features of a just immigration policy. We believe these features incorporate our nation's core values and God's guidance for the treatment of immigrants in a way that respects both the rule of law and the dignity of the millions of men, women, and children who are currently living here illegally.

Secure Borders. This is indispensable for any immigration policy to succeed. We must be able to control who enters this country. To simply address the situation of the millions who are here illegally without securing our borders is inviting another repeat of our dilemma. Border security must be actively maintained. We do not require fencing the entire borders north and south, but we expect any system that is put in place to be able to prohibit illegal entry.

Paths to legal status. A one-size fits all legal status is not constructive. The nation should offer multiple forms of legal status with appropriate requirements for each. Some undocumented immigrants likely desire citizenship. Others may only desire to remain here for a while and then return to their home countries when they have achieved certain goals. Others may desire to work here indefinitely but retain citizenship in their countries of origin. We see this as especially true, but not exclusively true, for highly skilled workers. We propose that our nation pursue all these avenues simultaneously, such as citizenship, permanent or temporary legal residency, temporary worker, etc.

We recognize that applying this approach to those who have come here illegally is not fair to those who have followed the law and have been waiting for long periods of time to gain legal entrance into our nation. We regret the additional frustration this creates for them. But we would point out that our proposal puts those who are here illegally behind those who have already applied for permanent legal status to enter or remain in this country. The primary benefit undocumented immigrants will derive is the opportunity to remain in the United States while they wait for their legal status to be conferred. Of course, this is a considerable benefit. Nevertheless, we currently have millions of people who are already here and we must find a just way to bring them out of the shadows.

Appropriate and adequate penalties and requirements. Those who are here illegally broke our laws and those of their own nations to get here. These laws were put in place in order to help the nations adequately manage the flow of people in and out of their borders. Immigration law in the U.S. is driven primarily by the national interest in assuring the ability of our nation to absorb and assimilate the influx of people. These laws are necessary. Those who came here illegally were aware that they were circumventing the process. If they desire to remain here, they must undergo a criminal background check, pay a fine, agree to pay back taxes, learn to speak, write, and read English and get in line behind those who are legally migrating into this country in order to apply for permanent residence after a probationary period of years. They must also acknowledge and pledge allegiance to America's governmental structure, the duties of citizenship and our core values as embodied in the Declaration of Independence.

This is not amnesty. Amnesty is what President Carter gave the draft dodgers who came home from Canada with no penalties, no fines, and no requirements whatsoever.

Financial penalties must be just, not only from the perspective of our nation's sense of justice but also for those who will be required to pay them. In other words, the penalties should seek restitution, not retribution. People who fail background checks or who refuse to comply with this generous opportunity to earn legal status, should be deported immediately.

Cut-off date for application for legal status. The offer for legal status for those who are here illegally must have a cut-off date. We recommend that this be one year after the passage of appropriate legislation. After that, anyone who is still here illegally will be deported and any employer who hires someone here illegally will suffer stringent penalties.

Limits on chain migration. Chain migration, the process of bringing extended members of one's family to the United States once one family member is settled here, is a significant concern to us and many people in the nation. If we are to allow millions of people to remain here, we must find a way to limit the influx of extended family members so that we leave room in our nation for future immigrants who have no family here. We propose that chain migration be limited to spouses and their natural or adopted children. We recommend that hardship exceptions be part of the limits to enable children to bring elderly parents to the U.S. who have no means of support in their home countries. In order to maintain our commitment to bringing in additional immigrants, we recommend that the number of family members who can be united with family members in the U.S. be subject to an annual cap.

Incentives for highly skilled immigrants. Our nation is in a competitive situation in a growing worldwide economy. In order to remain competitive and maintain our economic leadership in the world, we must encourage immigration of highly skilled workers in needed fields. This number should also be capped, but it should be sufficiently high to enable businesses to attract these highly skilled workers to the U.S.

Adequate penalties for those who hire undocumented immigrants. Businesses that hire workers illegally do so for profit. They think of undocumented immigrants as vulnerable and

exploitable. Consequently, they give them lower pay and fewer, if any, benefits. Such businesses should be penalized for their own participation in the encouragement of illegal immigration and breaking the nation's employment and labor laws. Penalties should be sufficient to remove any financial incentive to hire people illegally.

A dependable worker verification system. Businesses are not the only ones to blame for their hiring of undocumented immigrants. Our nation has not provided any dependable worker verification system. Undocumented immigrants with false or stolen social security numbers can easily subvert a company's safeguards. The government must provide businesses with a responsive, up-to-date system that enables them to verify a worker's status within one week. If the system fails to notify the employer in that period, the employer should no longer be held liable for hiring an undocumented immigrant if it has taken appropriate steps to verify the legal status of its employee.