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April 14, 2006

Ronald D. Leonhardt  
City Clerk  
City of Milwaukee  
200 E Wells St Rm 205  
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Dear Ronald,

Thank you for contacting me regarding immigration reform. I appreciate hearing from you.

As you probably know, in March 2006 the Senate Judiciary Committee, of which I am a member, considered an immigration reform proposal sponsored by the Chairman of the Committee, Senator Arlen Specter (R-PA). The Committee considered the bill over several days, and ultimately reported an amended version of the Chairman's mark to the full Senate by a vote of 12-6 on March 27, 2006. I voted in favor of the bill.

On March 29, 2006, the Senate began consideration of S. 2454, an immigration bill sponsored by Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist (R-TN). During the Senate's consideration of S. 2454, Senator Specter offered the Judiciary Committee bill as a complete substitute amendment to replace Senator Frist's bill. Unfortunately, efforts to end debate and bring this amendment to a final vote were defeated by a vote of 39-60. Efforts to limit debate on Senator Frist's bill also were defeated, by a vote of 36-62. It is unclear at this time when the Senate will resume consideration of either immigration reform proposal.

I support the bill that was reported to the full Senate by the Judiciary Committee because it is a pragmatic, comprehensive approach to our country's immigration problems. It would strengthen border security, which is vital, while also creating a system that allows law-abiding non-citizens to enter the country legally to work when there is truly a need for their labor, and that deals with the "shadow population" of undocumented immigrants who are already here.

The Judiciary Committee bill, as well as a separate proposal sponsored by Senators John McCain (R-AZ) and Edward Kennedy (D-MA) known as the Secure America and Orderly Immigration Act (S. 1033), would allow undocumented aliens to earn legalized status, but only if they could show work history, satisfy background checks, pay fines, fulfill English language and civics requirements, and wait at the back of the line in order to obtain permanent status. In other words, people who come forward and play by the rules would be able to earn a path to permanent legal status.

The Judiciary Committee bill also would create a guest worker program that allows employers in the future to turn to foreign labor, but only when they cannot find American workers to do the

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job. This approach would recognize that American businesses need access to foreign workers for jobs they cannot fill with American workers, and help to avoid a future flow of undocumented workers. This new guest worker program also would include strong labor protections to ensure that foreign labor does not adversely affect wages and working conditions for U.S. workers. We must not create a second class of workers subject to lower wages and fewer workplace protections, which would hurt all workers by driving down wages for everyone.

I do not support the immigration reform bill recently passed by the House, H.R. 4437, nor do I support Senator Frist's bill, S. 2454. These bills would criminalize millions of people who are undocumented or who have provided humanitarian assistance to the undocumented. They do not contain the important reforms to our immigration system that are in the Judiciary Committee bill, which would bring illegal aliens out of the shadows and ensure that our government knows who is entering this country for legitimate reasons.

The Judiciary Committee bill is not perfect, and it contains some provisions that concern me. But overall it is a strong piece of legislation, and I hope that ultimately, the Senate will pass the bill reported by the Judiciary Committee or a similar comprehensive proposal.

Again, thank you for taking the time to share your views with me. I look forward to hearing from you in the future.

Sincerely,



Russell D. Feingold  
United States Senator