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United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4903

April 27, 2006

Mr. Ronald Leonhardt
City Clerk
City of Milwaukee
200 East Wells Street
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53202-3515

Dear Mr. Leonhardt:

Thank you for taking the time to contact me. I always appreciate hearing from people back home in Wisconsin. I apologize for the delay in my response, and I would like to take this opportunity to address your concerns.

I am deeply concerned about the current state of our immigration system. Illegal immigration has been a longstanding problem in this country, but despite past efforts, we have never dealt with it effectively. Going forward, we must do a much better job of cracking down on illegal immigration. It is imperative that Congress enact legislation that secures our nation's borders, particularly our southern border, to stem the flow of illegal immigration and make sure we do not end up in our current situation again. The legislation I have supported includes strong enforcement measures. It would double the number of border patrol and interior enforcement officers, increase the number of detention beds, expand the use of technology to monitor our borders, and make it easier to deport dangerous individuals.

It is also important to acknowledge, however, that this is a difficult issue that does not lend itself to an easy solution. While we must vigorously enforce our immigration laws, we also must have a practical solution for dealing with the 11 million undocumented individuals living in our country today. Most of these people have been here for years. They have set down roots in our communities, raised their children here, worked hard, paid their taxes, and stayed out of trouble. Simply deporting all of them would be both costly and impractical.

Therefore, I support proposals which provide a rigorous, but fair, path to legalization. The legislation I have voted for allows an undocumented worker to earn citizenship over the course of eleven or twelve years if they can demonstrate that they have been living in the U.S. for a number of years, pay a fine, work for an additional six years, pay taxes, learn English, and undergo criminal and security background checks. Only then are they allowed to go to the back of the citizenship line. This, I believe, is a practical solution that will allow us to concentrate our resources on securing our porous southern border and making sure employers are not hiring undocumented workers.

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In March, the Senate Judiciary Committee, of which I am a member, took up legislation to reform our immigration system. I was pleased that the Committee approved a bill sponsored by Senator Specter (R-PA), a comprehensive immigration reform package that was both tough and fair. This legislation would make significant improvements to our border security and enhance enforcement of our immigration laws. It also included a way for hard-working people who are already here to earn citizenship and a legal channel for temporary workers to enter this country in the future. I voted in favor of this bipartisan legislation, which passed the Judiciary Committee by a vote of 12-6.

On March 16, 2006, the full Senate began consideration of immigration reform. Unfortunately, efforts to adopt the Judiciary Committee's bipartisan, comprehensive immigration reform legislation were blocked despite my vote in favor of it.

Senators Hagel (R-NE) and Martinez (R-FL) also offered a compromise bill on the floor. The Hagel-Martinez compromise was similar to the Judiciary Committee bill, but it was modified to only allow undocumented workers who have been in this country for more than five years to go to the back of the line and get on a path to citizenship. Workers who have been here less than five years would have to leave the country or participate in the temporary worker program. I voted in favor of a procedural motion that would have allowed us to adopt the Hagel-Martinez bill, but, unfortunately, that motion was defeated by a vote of 38-60.

I am disappointed that the Senate has been unable to complete action on comprehensive immigration reform legislation. Securing our borders and putting an end to illegal immigration is simply too important to our security to give up. I am hopeful that we will continue to work toward a solution to this problem, and I look forward to working with my colleagues in the coming weeks to craft a comprehensive immigration reform package that meets both our security and our economic needs.

Again, thank you for contacting me. You can be assured I will keep your thoughts in mind.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Herb Kohl".

Herb Kohl
United States Senator

HK:jxd