



United States Senator
Richard Shelby
REPORTS TO ALABAMA



AMNESTY IS NOT THE ANSWER

By: Senator Richard Shelby (R-AL)

The Senate is currently debating S.2611, the Immigration Reform bill. While the legislation includes important provisions on border security and interior enforcement, the Hagel-Martinez “compromise” also creates a system that grants amnesty to the approximately 12 million illegal aliens currently residing in the United States. I am adamantly opposed to any legislation that turns a blind eye and rewards illegal immigrants for breaking the law.

I believe that any legislation approved by the Senate should include strong, definitive measures to address border security and interior enforcement. I believe the President’s proposal to put National Guard troops on our borders is a good first step. I also believe we should continue to construct physical barriers to prevent unlawful entry at our borders. A secure border coupled with strong enforcement laws will begin to eliminate the market for illegal workers and allow the United States to begin to truly address the problem of illegal immigration.

During debate on S.2611, Senator Isakson offered an amendment which sought to delay implementation of the amnesty provisions included in the bill until the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security certifies that border security measures are implemented. I voted against the Isakson Amendment because I believe the amendment created a framework to automatically grant amnesty to illegal aliens once the border security provisions were in place. Border security has always been, and will continue to be my top priority to address the problem of illegal immigration. But I do not, under any circumstances, support granting amnesty to illegal aliens.

While some have construed my vote against the Isakson Amendment as a vote against border security -- they are wrong. Quite simply, the Isakson Amendment DOES NOT require additional debate or action by Congress before illegal immigrants are granted amnesty -- something I do not and cannot support. Had

the Isakson Amendment simply called for securing our borders and stripped the amnesty provisions from the bill, it would have had my strong support.

History has shown us that amnesty does nothing to stem the flow of illegal immigrants. Twenty years ago, Congress passed and the President signed into law the Simpson-Mazzoli Immigration bill. Like the legislation the Senate is currently debating, the Simpson-Mazzoli bill provided amnesty to millions of illegal immigrants residing in the United States.

The argument for amnesty at the time was the same that it is today -- an amnesty program with proper enforcement would stem the flow of illegal immigrants and allow the United States to begin to address the problems surrounding illegal immigration. I opposed amnesty then and I oppose amnesty still today.

In the 20 years, since the Simpson-Mazzoli Amnesty bill became law, we have experienced an influx of approximately 12 million illegal aliens -- perhaps more, no one is really sure. The amnesty approach, I believe it is fair to say, is far from a success story and I am baffled as to why anyone believes that it will become one now.

The United States can and should send the message that we will not tolerate illegal immigration. In order to do that, Congress and the President must work together to secure our borders and enforce our laws. That should be our first priority. Any debate or discussion regarding amnesty should be left for another day. To do otherwise, sends the wrong message to those seeking to come to the United States illegally.

As the Senate continues to debate immigration reform legislation I plan to support amendments that strengthen our borders, tighten our immigration laws and punish -- not reward -- illegal immigration. I will also continue to oppose any proposal that endorses, supports or includes amnesty for illegal immigrants.

FOR RELEASE UPON RECEIPT: MAY 19, 2006



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