

Joseph R. Biden, Jr., President of the Senate. The letter referred to Executive Order 13667, which is listed in Appendix D at the end of this

volume. The letter was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on May 13.

Remarks on Immigration Reform at a Meeting With Law Enforcement Leaders

May 13, 2014

Thank you, everybody. Have a seat, have a seat. Well, it's wonderful to see all of you. Some of you I've had the chance to get to know working on law enforcement issues and criminal justice issues. But I cannot thank you enough for participating today on an issue that I think is important to our economic future, to our cultural future, to our standing in the world, and to our safety and security, and that's the issue of immigration.

I'm here with some of the leaders of America's law enforcement agencies who recognize that fixing a broken immigration system isn't just the right thing to do, it's also the right thing to do for safety and security in communities all across America.

The immigration system that we have right now makes it harder, not easier, for law enforcement agencies to do their jobs. It makes it harder for law enforcement to know when dangerous people cross our borders. It makes it harder for business owners who play by the rules to compete when they're undercut by those who would exploit workers in a shadow economy. And it makes it harder for law enforcement to do their jobs when large segments of the community are afraid to report crimes or serve as witnesses because they fear the consequences for themselves or their families.

This system is not fair. It's not fair to workers; it's not fair to businesses who are trying to do the right thing; it's not fair to law enforcement agencies that are already stretched thin.

Now, the good news is, the Senate has already passed a bill with a wide, bipartisan majority that would go a long way towards fixing a broken system. It would strengthen our borders even further. And I'm sure Jeh has talked to you about the work that's been done over the last 5 years. We have put unprecedented

resources at the borders, and you've seen the results. We have fewer folks coming in than ever before. And the personnel that is arrayed along our borders is well beyond anything that we saw 5 years ago, 10 years ago, 20 years ago. So we take border enforcement seriously.

But what this reform package would also do is create a firm, but fair pathway to earned citizenship for those who live in the shadows, and as a consequence, would give law enforcement a better idea of who's in the country. It would also help build trust between local communities and law enforcement and immigrant communities. It would undermine criminal enterprises that prey on undocumented immigrants. And it would allow law enforcement to focus on its primary mission, which is keeping our communities safe.

And these are some of the reasons why a broad, bipartisan coalition—including law enforcement agencies like the ones who are represented today—is pushing Congress to go ahead and get the job done and get us over the finish line and do it this year.

I hope all of you keep it up because it's making a difference. A number of Republicans are realizing that blocking immigration reform is not an option, and that's the good news. And most Americans—the majority of Americans—know this is the right thing to do. Public opinion is on our side on this. Unfortunately, we've got a handful of House Republicans right now who are blocking going ahead and letting legislation get to the floor.

To their credit, I think Speaker Boehner and some of the other leaders there do believe that immigration reform is the right thing, but they've got to have a political space that allows them to go ahead and get it through their caucus and get it done. I've said to them, if they've

got a—ideas, I'm happy to talk to them. We're not hell bent on making sure that every letter of what's in the Senate bill is exactly what ultimately lands on my desk for signature, but there are some core principles that we've got to get done. We've got to have stronger border security. We've got to make sure that we are dealing with companies that are not doing the right thing by workers. We've got to make sure that we've got an improved legal immigration system, because a lot of folks are getting pushed into the illegal system because the waits are so long through the legal process. And we've got to make sure that there's a way for people to earn some pathway to citizenship.

And keep in mind—some of these statistics you may have already heard—it's estimated that over 80 percent of the folks who are here on an undocumented basis have been here 10 years or longer. These are folks who are woven into the fabrics of our communities. Their kids are going to school with our kids. Most of them are not making trouble; most of them are not causing crimes. And yet we put them in this untenable position, and it creates a situation in which your personnel, who have got to go after gangbangers and need to be going after violent criminals and deal with the whole range of challenges and who have to cooperate with DHS around our counterterrorism activities, you've got to spend time dealing with somebody who is not causing any other trouble other than the fact that they were trying to make a living for their families. That's just not a good use of our resources. It's not smart. It doesn't make sense.

So I know I'm preaching to the choir here. You wouldn't be here if you didn't agree with us that this is time for us to go ahead and get moving. But I just want all of you to know, your voices, particularly over the next couple of months, are going to be critical. I think people have come to expect that I'm in favor of comprehensive immigration reform. I think that people anticipate that the Congressional Hispanic Caucus is going to be in favor of comprehensive immigration reform. I think people understand that there are a lot of agricultural enterprises that know how important their immigrant workers are to them. But it's more im-

portant in some ways to get over the hump when they hear from unexpected voices.

I think the evangelical Christian community has shown itself to be foursquare behind immigration reform, and that's a powerful voice. I think portions of the business community that people may not anticipate know that this is the key to our economic future. It would lower our deficits; it would grow our economy; it would bring in some of the most skilled people around the world. We want them to continue to come here. That's part of our competitive advantage relative to the rest of the world. Our population is not aging the way some other populations are because it's constantly replenished with folks who are go-getters. And hearing from law enforcement is important, and I think it lends this overall effort great credibility.

So I just want to say thank you to all of you. But we've got this narrow window. The closer we get to the midterm elections, the harder it is to get things done around here. Now, I know it's hard to believe that things could get harder to—[laughter]—that this place could get a little more dysfunctional. But it's just very hard right before an election. So we've got maybe a window of 2, 3 months to get the ball rolling in the House of Representatives. And your voices are going to be absolutely critical to that effort.

So I just want to say thank you to all of you. And while I'm here, I want to thank you for the wide range of issues that we've had a chance to cooperate with you on. Whether it's dealing with counterterrorism issues and the preparations that ensure that if and when an event happens, that we're prepared and, more importantly, that we're able to prevent such activities from taking place in the first place, or dealing with natural disasters where our first responders are always right there on the scene, day in and day out your teams, your personnel are doing heroic work on behalf of America. And we're very, very grateful for that.

So thank you, everybody. Let's make this happen. All right?

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:01 p.m. in Room 350 of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building.