

Senate Begins Consideration of Historic Immigration Legislation

WASHINGTON (Tuesday, June 11, 2013) –The Senate moved Tuesday to begin consideration of the bipartisan the Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act, the comprehensive immigration reform bill. Judiciary Committee Chairman Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.), who is managing the bill on the Senate floor, called on lawmakers to pass the measure and send it to the House for consideration.

“We should send to the House the best bill that we can,” Leahy said. “We should do what is right, what is fair, and what is just.”

Leahy noted that the Republican-controlled House passed the Senate’s bipartisan Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act earlier this year after Senators stood together and passed that measure with overwhelming support, including the support of more than half of all Senate Republicans. Leahy, who with Senator Mike Crapo (R-Idaho) authored the VAWA measure that was signed into law in March, said Senators should come together to support meaningful immigration reform that will unite families and provide a legal pathway to citizenship for millions of individuals.

“For those who argue that the Senate immigration reform bill must be undermined to conform to demands intended to appease the House Republican majority, I disagree,” he said. “The Senate should pass the best bill for the economy, for our families and for our Nation. We should do what we think is right.”

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Statement of Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.)

Chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee

The Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act, S.744

June 11, 2013

For the past several days, Senators have been discussing the Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act, and I am glad the full Senate has now turned to consider this important bipartisan legislation. I intend to file a handful of amendments to the bill today and I encourage others to do the same so we can get to work without further delay.

This bipartisan immigration bill is a measure the Senate should come together to pass. We should send to the House the best bill that we can. We should do what is right, what is fair, and what is just. The House must also consider comprehensive immigration reform legislation without further delay.

One of the first and most important bills we enacted into law this year was the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act. From the outset I worked with Senator Crapo to develop that legislation in a bipartisan way. We worked with Senators on both sides of the aisle. We had cosponsors from both sides of the aisle. We took suggestions and amendments from both sides of the aisle and we built a majority of Senators in support. I worked very hard to keep that measure bipartisan when others wanted to make it into a partisan issue.

Last year we were able to have our bill considered and it passed the Senate with 68 votes, a bipartisan majority. Parenthetically, I note that just yesterday, we passed the Farm bill with fewer votes in what The New York Times described as “overwhelming bipartisan support.” When the House of Representatives would not take it up our VAWA legislation before the election last fall we redoubled our efforts during the lame duck session and then reintroduced our bill with some modifications at the beginning of this year. I sought to make it our first legislative priority of the new Congress. With the strong support and leadership of the Majority Leader, the Senate turned to it, considered it and passed it as one of our very first legislative matters in February. We passed it with an even stronger bipartisan majority this year than last, although many of those who now oppose immigration reform continued voting against reauthorizing the Violence Against Women Act. We passed a strong, principled bill.

Those who urged me to abandon my efforts in VAWA to protect *all victims* were proven wrong. I was told repeatedly that the House of Representatives would never consider, let alone pass our bill that provided fairness for gay and lesbian victims and that we would never be able to provide meaningful protections for Native American women being brutalized by non-Indians on reservations. In spite of all the dire predictions and political naysayers, our bipartisan group of Senators stuck to our principles. The Senate stood firm and did the right thing.

What happened then and how were we able to enact our bill into law? The American people supported our bill and demanded action. There were some Republican members of the House, like Tom Cole of Oklahoma, who knew the right thing to do and were willing to say that they wanted to do it. More and more House Republicans came around to our view. The House changed its stance and considered our bill. It passed and is now law. President Obama signed it on March 7 in an emotional ceremony in which he thanked legislators from both sides of the aisle for protecting all victims of domestic violence and human trafficking.

Relevant to the pending immigration bill, there was one piece of the original Leahy-Crapo VAWA bill that was requested by law enforcement to help immigrant victims of violence. We sought to increase U visas for abused immigrant women so that they could be protected

and help law enforcement go after the abusers. That provision had a technical budget affect that last year the House used as an excuse not to consider our bill. I promised at the beginning of this year that I would continue fighting to enact that measure but that it would be taken out of the VAWA bill to avoid the blue slip issue. I am happy to report that these important U visas are now part of comprehensive immigration reform legislation about to come before us.

For those who argue that the Senate immigration reform bill must be undermined to conform to demands intended to appease the House Republican majority, I disagree. The Senate should pass the best bill for the economy, for our families and for our Nation. We should do what we think is right.

The House of Representatives is clearly in a different place than those who support the Senate bill. Just last Thursday, House Republicans voted to end President Obama's administrative program to help DREAMers, the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, until such time as we can pass the DREAM Act. The DREAM Act is in our Senate immigration reform bill. It recognizes that young people here without fault of their own, who are in school or the military, and in good standing should not be deported because they are undocumented. They are Americans and should be part of this Nation's future. Senator Durbin has been right to fight for them and to insist on the DREAM Act being included in our legislation, and President Obama was right today to highlight the achievements and contributions these young people make to our country and will continue to make if this bill were to become law. Should we now abandon them and agree to strike those just measures from the Senate bill because Representative King of Iowa and other House Republicans do not like them? I say no. The Senate should do what is right.

I am inspired by the young DREAMers I have met over the last several years and by the courageous testimony of Juan Antonio Vargas and Gaby Pacheco during our hearings this year.

Our bill should include the DREAM Act, just as we should protect and include the fair but tough pathway to citizenship included in the bill reported by the Senate Judiciary Committee. These provisions are at the core of our bill. The vote by the Republicans in the House of Representatives to prevent DREAMers from being able to stay in the United States is not the example that the United States Senate should follow.

A few days ago, [The New York Times](#) had a lead editorial that accurately describes where we are. It cautions against making bad modifications to the bill. It urges "bipartisanship and courage," and that we stand up to "bad politics and bad policy." I hope that the Senate will heed this call. I ask that a copy of this past Sunday's editorial be included in the Record.

Over this past weekend, I was happy to hear Senator Ayotte pledge her support to this bipartisan legislation. I worked with her earlier this year to get the Leahy-Crapo Violence Against Women Act reauthorized. Senator Ayotte was an important leader in her caucus on that bipartisan bill and I hope and expect she will be on the bipartisan immigration bill as

well, especially since it also contains several protections for victims of domestic violence and human trafficking.

Just this morning the President of the United States spoke to us and to all America about the need for Congress to pass comprehensive immigration reform. He called our common-sense, bipartisan bill “the best chance we have had in years to fix the broken immigration system” and urged us to do the right thing and to do it now. He was joined by a cross section of distinguished Americans, from DREAMers to former Bush administration officials to business leaders and law enforcement representatives and clergy. I look forward to meeting with the President later this week along with a bipartisan group of Senators as we work together to pass common sense, comprehensive immigration reform.

Immigration reform is an important economic issue, but it is also a civil rights issue and an issue of fundamental fairness. If a majority of us stand together and if we stay true to our values and our agreements, I believe that we can pass legislation that will be a continuing renewal of our spirit, our creativity and vitality as a Nation and which will uphold our great traditions of compassion and humanity as a welcoming nation. That is what I believe the Senate should do.

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