



Durbin: Only comprehensive reform can fix our broken immigration system

May 24 2017 10:28 AM

WASHINGTON – Today, during the Senate Immigration Subcommittee’s first hearing of the new Congress, Ranking Member Dick Durbin (D-IL) raised questions about the efficacy of making additional multi-billion-dollar investments in border security, as border apprehensions have declined drastically, and whether our limited resources would be better spent elsewhere, including addressing the root causes of unauthorized migration. Senator Durbin also noted that Republican efforts to militarize the border draw attention away from the urgent need for comprehensive immigration reform with a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants with deep roots in the United States.

“The U.S. government already spends more on immigration enforcement – listen to this – than all other federal law enforcement agencies combined...According to Border Patrol statistics, the number of migrants apprehended trying to cross the U.S.-Mexico border has declined from about 1.6 million in Fiscal Year 2000 to about 408,000 in Fiscal Year 2016. And from 2009 to 2014, net migration from Mexico to the U.S. was below zero; in other words, more Mexicans returned to Mexico than came to the United States. Yet the President insists that we must build a “big, beautiful wall” on the Southern border,” said Durbin. “I’m not averse to making investments in border security, but we know the real answer to this issue: we need a comprehensive immigration reform bill.”

Video of Durbin’s remarks before the subcommittee is available [here](#).

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Senator Durbin’s remarks, as prepared for delivery, are available below:

**Opening Statement of Senator Dick Durbin
Ranking Member, Senate Immigration Subcommittee**

“Building America’s Trust Through Border Security: Progress on the Southern Border”

May 23, 2017

Mr. Chairman, congratulations on your appointment as Chairman of the Immigration Subcommittee. As the new Ranking Member of this Subcommittee, I look forward to working with you.

There are more issues facing this Subcommittee than any other. They are far-reaching and historic, and reach the heart of our Constitutional values. I hope this is only the first of many meetings to explore these timely and critical issues relating to immigration.

Let’s just recognize a few of these issues. I believe we should have convened meetings to consider President Trump’s executive order restricting travel to the United States. And of course the President’s January 25th executive order making up to eight million immigrants priorities for deportation and seeking to create a deportation force by tripling the number of immigration agents. This order also aims to deprive communities of billions of dollars in critical federal funding if they refuse to take part in this mass deportation plan. This threat ignores the reality that the vast majority of undocumented immigrants are law-abiding individuals who make important economic contributions and have deep roots in our country.

The President’s controversial travel ban sought to ban refugees, as well as nationals from six Muslim-majority countries. Turning away innocent children fleeing persecution, genocide, and terror is an attack on religious freedom that has alienated critical allies and 1.6 billion Muslims around the world. At the request of Senator Duckworth and myself, the DHS Inspector General has opened an investigation into the chaotic implementation of this executive order. Why has this Subcommittee not taken this matter up?

These executive orders fall squarely under the jurisdiction of this Subcommittee and there is ample precedent for hearings. During the Obama Administration, the Republican majority held numerous oversight hearings concerning the Executive Branch’s immigration policies. Members who now sit on this subcommittee at the time encouraged more oversight hearings of the previous Administration.

Instead, our first hearing is focused on border security. Let’s be clear: the U.S. government already spends more on immigration enforcement than all other federal law enforcement agencies combined.

From Fiscal Year 2003 to Fiscal Year 2016, the number of immigration agents nearly tripled and the number of Border Patrol agents nearly doubled. CBP now has the largest number of armed, sworn law enforcement officers in our country, nearly double the number of the FBI, DEA, ATF, and Secret Service combined.

According to Border Patrol statistics, the number of migrants apprehended trying to cross the U.S.-Mexico border has declined from about 1.6 million in Fiscal Year 2000 to about 408,000 in Fiscal Year 2016. And from 2009 to 2014, net migration from Mexico to the U.S. was below zero; in other words, more Mexicans returned to Mexico than came to the United States.

Yet the President insists that we must build a “big, beautiful wall” on the Southern border. Mexico will not pay for the wall, as the President promised, and the Homeland Security Committee has estimated the wall will cost nearly \$70 billion to build and \$150 million a year to maintain. Even the Trump Administration acknowledges the wall will cost at least \$21.6 billion, and that’s not including maintenance.

Texas Republican Congressman Will Hurd, whose district covers 800 miles of the Southwest border, has described the wall as, “the most expensive and least effective way to secure the border.” And I want to commend Chairman Cornyn for raising concerns as well. The Chairman said, quote, “I don’t think we’re just going to be able to solve border security with a physical barrier because people can come under, around it and through it.”

Why doesn’t this Subcommittee have a hearing on the most effective border security strategies and see where this “big beautiful wall” places in the competition?

In addition to the wall, the President has ordered CBP to hire 5,000 additional Border Patrol agents, a 25 percent increase in CBP manpower, at the cost of billions of additional dollars. When you think about all of the threats that our country faces – terrorism, cyberattacks, the opioid crisis, gun violence – it is astounding that the President would prioritize adding 5,000 agents to what is already, by far, the largest law-enforcement force in the country.

I’m very concerned that this could lead to weakening your standards and an increase in corruption and misconduct, which the Border Patrol experienced during a previous hiring surge. In fact, the Government Accountability Office found that more than 2,100 agents were arrested for misconduct in 2005-2012.

In response, Congress required all Border Patrol applicants to submit to polygraph exams. CBP applicants’ failure rate of approximately 65% on these polygraph exams

greatly exceeds that of other law enforcement agencies, including the FBI and Secret Service, which have failure rates of less than 35%.

A Homeland Security Advisory Panel, co-chaired by former NYPD Police Commissioner Bill Bratton and former Bush Administration DEA Administrator Karen Tandy found, quote, “CBP remains vulnerable to corruption that threatens its effectiveness and national security.”

Last year, this panel recommended expanding the CBP polygraph program to include post-employment random and targeted polygraphs, which the FBI, DIA, CIA, and NSA already do. GAO made a similar recommendation 5 years ago.

But instead CBP has begun using a scaled-back polygraph exam with fewer questions and Congress is considering legislation to completely waive the polygraph requirement in some instances. DHS Inspector General John Roth said of this plan, quote, “It could put CBP at significant risk.”

During today’s hearing, I would like to hear how CBP plans to mitigate concerns about increased corruption and misconduct as it carries out the President’s hiring surge, especially with weaker polygraph testing. I’m concerned that this issue is not even mentioned in the witness’ written testimony.

I’m not averse to additional investments in border security, but the reality is that only a smart, comprehensive approach can fix our broken immigration system. Just yesterday, DHS released a report finding that more than 600,000 foreign nationals overstayed their visas last year and experts estimate that more than 40 percent of undocumented immigrants are visa overstays. A border wall and more Border Patrol agents will do nothing to address this issue.

In 2013, when Democrats were in the majority, I was part of the “Gang of 8” – 4 Republicans and 4 Democrats – who authored a comprehensive immigration reform bill that passed the Senate on a bipartisan 68-32 vote. Unfortunately, the Republican leadership in the House of Representatives refused to consider it.

Our bill included billions of dollars to strengthen border security, including funding for additional technology, fencing, and Border Patrol agents. But it also:

- Required electronic tracking of visa overstays;
- Reduced the job magnet for undocumented immigration by requiring employers to verify the immigration status of their workers and creating new avenues for legal immigration; and

- Provided a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants who do not pose any threat to our nation.

Only a comprehensive plan like this can secure our border and our nation.

We also must address the root causes of the problems at our Southern border. I want to commend DHS Secretary Kelly for correctly pointing out that a significant factor driving migrants from the Northern Triangle to flee to our border is, quote, “the terrible conditions in terms of violence and intimidation that exist in these countries largely due to the drug demand in the United States.”

More than 8 years ago, in March 2009, I held my first hearing as Chairman of the Crime and Drugs Subcommittee on the threat posed by Mexican drug cartels. I noted then, quote, “The insatiable demand for illegal drugs in the United States keeps the Mexican drug cartels in business and the iron river of guns from the United States arms the cartels to the teeth.” Unfortunately this problem has only grown worse since then. The GAO found that 70 percent of all crime guns recovered and traced in Mexico from 2009 to 2014 came from the United States. Clearly we have not taken the kind of serious action needed to crack down on illegal gun trafficking, and I’m disappointed that there is no mention of this issue in the witness’ written statement.

I look forward to working with the Chairman and the Subcommittee on this and so many other critical issues that need to be addressed to make our nation safer and respect our heritage as a nation of immigrants.