



Reply from Senator Harkin

1 message

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To: pruntyld@gmail.com

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TOM HARKIN
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June 25, 2013

Mr. Lyle Prunty
1803 E Mound St Apt 7
Algona, IA 50511-1211

Dear Lyle:

Thank you for contacting me with your views on the need to reform our immigration laws.

Since 2007, our country has significantly increased its focus on enforcing existing immigration laws and securing our border. Our government spends more than \$18 billion annually on immigration and border enforcement - an amount greater than all other federal law enforcement agencies combined - including the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Drug Enforcement Agency, Transportation and Security Administration, the United States Park Police, the Secret Service and many others. The number of Customs and Border Patrol Agents stationed on the border has nearly doubled since Congress last took up this matter. As a result, the number of undocumented immigrants arriving to the United States across the southern border has declined by 80 percent. In addition, annual deportations are higher than they have ever been - approaching 400,000 people annually. In short, we have made significant strides in enforcing immigration laws and securing our border. Progress made in these respects now provides an opportunity for our country to address those aspects of our immigration system that continue to call out for change.

A bipartisan group of eight of my colleagues introduced S. 744, the

Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act, which is currently before the full Senate. I welcome their contribution and look forward to an open debate on how to address our broken immigration system. I have long supported taking an accountable, common-sense approach to immigration reform that creates a long-term solution and fixes our immigration problem once and for all. Such an approach should include continued enforcement of immigration laws, maintaining a secure border, assuring that all immigrants pay their taxes, requiring employers to verify that their employees are authorized to work in the United States, helping unite families, and offering a practical solution to the 11 million undocumented immigrants currently present in the United States, particularly those brought over as children through no fault of their own. Based upon what I have thus far learned about S. 744, there is much in the legislation that is consistent with my principles for immigration reform.

This legislation does, however, include new and expanded visa programs for temporary workers that concern me. Specifically, the provisions regarding H1-B visas for highly skilled workers, which were agreed upon by the Judiciary Committee, give me pause. According to the Economic Policy Institute, unemployment in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) fields is twice as high as it was last decade, and wages in high tech fields are stagnant - a sign that there's currently no generalized shortage of qualified workers applying for high tech jobs. Despite these facts, a small number of companies continue to utilize H1-B visas rather than offer higher wages for qualified American workers, driving down wages for qualified American workers. This also leave little to no visas for other professions and regions that urgently need them, such as medical professionals in rural Iowa. Any deal to increase the number of H1-B or other visas for temporary workers should include greater protections for domestic and foreign workers so that wages and labor standards are not lowered across entire industries.

I hope that as the Senate continues to debate this legislation on the Senate floor that we can achieve a bill that will strengthen protections for American workers and increase the availability of good, middle class jobs while at the same time creating a humane, family-based immigration system.

Again, I thank you for contacting me on this issue. Please rest assured that I will keep your views in mind as the Senate debates S. 744, and considers amendments to this legislation.

Sincerely,

Tom Harkin
United States Senator