

House Judiciary Committee Member Day Hearing

October 22, 2021

Rep. Meijer Testimony

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and Mr. Ranking Member, for calling this hearing today and giving Members the opportunity to highlight issues that are important to our constituents and potential solutions that we are hoping to work with you on in order to address them.

Immigration has become one of the most divisive and polarizing issues in our current political environment, but it doesn't have to be. In fact, I would go as far as to say that there is widespread agreement across the political spectrum on the fact that our current immigration system is not working how it should be. What we need now is a more thoughtful, deliberate, and bipartisan approach to fixing the many problems currently plaguing that system.

Securing our border and reforming our broken legal immigration system are not mutually exclusive. It is frustrating that the Biden Administration's failed border policies have made any other immigration-related conversations much more difficult. We have all witnessed the unprecedented crisis on our southern border since President Biden took office and I have joined my colleagues on the Homeland Security Committee in demanding that the Administration take the necessary steps to address it. We traveled to the border earlier this year to see the situation firsthand and talk to the law enforcement officers on the frontlines who are dealing with heartbreaking and overwhelming circumstances on a daily basis.

Border security is not simply an issue for southern border states. It has been one of the most consistent issues that I hear about directly from my constituents. They have serious concerns about what they are seeing from this Administration. Border security is a major concern for Americans all over the country, and the impacts of inadequate border policies are felt in every community. Earlier this year, when the Administration was completely overwhelmed by the number of migrants coming across the border, they were forced to open several Emergency Intake Sites across the country to house unaccompanied minor children, including one such site in my district in Michigan.

I strongly encourage Members not to immediately dismiss commonsense border security improvements because of the state of political rhetoric in this country.

Back in April, I was proud to join my colleagues in introducing H.R. 2321, the Border Surge Response and Resilience Act. This bipartisan bill would require DHS and federal partners to establish a comprehensive plan to respond to irregular migration surges, allowing the Department to manage a border surge before it becomes unsustainable. The bill would also establish a fund designated solely for implementation of this plan, allowing DHS to immediately access needed resources to address these challenges without waiting months for supplemental appropriations from Congress.

We cannot allow these types of crises to continue administration after administration. It is time for Congress to take charge and provide clear directives and adequate resources for planning and surge response. This will reduce the risk of future humanitarian emergencies like the one we are seeing today. It should not be difficult to both care deeply about the root causes of migration and also advocate for logical and humane policies that would ensure surges of individuals coming to the border do not get out of control and end up having an adverse effect on both local border communities and vulnerable migrant populations seeking a better life.

The Administration has failed to take responsibility for the crisis or take any of the actions necessary to address it. That is why I also joined my colleagues in introducing H.R. 4828, the Border Security for America Act, to require DHS to resume construction of the border wall system, deploy effective technology to support Border Patrol operations, and provide more resources to CBP officers and agents on the ground at all U.S. ports of entry. Maintaining operational control and awareness across the southern border should not be a partisan issue. It is a practical homeland security imperative.

As I stated before, one of my main frustrations with the Biden Administration's policies regarding the southern border is that they have made it much more difficult for Congress to cooperate on needed reforms to our legal immigration system. I am proud to have joined my colleagues on several pieces of bipartisan legislation to address some of these challenges and I would encourage the committee to consider these efforts as well.

H.R. 3215, the Temporary Family Visitation Act, would establish a new nonimmigrant visa classification for individuals seeking to temporarily enter the United States to visit a relative who is a U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident.

This would ease the current obstacles that prevent families from being together for special occasions like holidays, birthdays, graduations, and weddings.

H.R. 3897, the H-2B Returning Worker Exception Act of 2021, would make key reforms to the H-2B program by exempting returning workers from an existing numerical cap while also supporting American employers who are dependent on this seasonal guest worker program and protecting American workers by enhancing anti-fraud and compliance measures.

I was also proud to join my friend from Colorado, Mr. Crow, in introducing H.R. 5134, the SAVE Afghan Partners Act of 2021. This bipartisan bill would raise the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa cap and clarify eligibility requirements for Afghan nationals who worked alongside the U.S. military and on behalf of the U.S. mission in Afghanistan. As we continue our efforts to resettle those vulnerable Afghans that have been brought to the U.S. and work to get out those who have been left behind, this bill will be critical to ensure those who risked their lives for the United States receive the status and benefits they deserve.

There is a lot of room for us to work together on incremental immigration reform. The current system is riddled with illogical bureaucratic obstacles and penalties, and it also does not sufficiently serve our national economic interests. We should focus on the changes that we can make today, as many of these seemingly small changes will have enormous impacts on many Americans and their family members.

I look forward to continuing to work with all of you on efforts to enhance our border security and reform our broken immigration system, and I encourage the Committee to consider some of the measures that I have highlighted today. There is room for both compassion and security in our immigration policies if we have the political will to find it. Thank you again for the opportunity to speak to the Committee today, and I yield back.