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MOBILE AND MANUFACTURED HOMES

REMARKS FOR THE AUGUST 14, 2006
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee:

Thank you for inviting me to testify today. We appreciate the issue of immigration reform has become highly controversial in Washington, but we sincerely hope significant reform can be accomplished during this legislative session. It is also appropriate that you meet in San Diego where the realities of immigration, both the positive and the negative impacts, are an integral part of our everyday life. This is particularly true in the 40th Senate District which I am privileged to represent, which includes the entire California border with Mexico and adjacent communities in San Diego, Imperial and Riverside Counties.

Let me say, at the outset, California has certainly experienced costs associated with immigration, be it documented or undocumented, and take this opportunity to reiterate the State's concern with recent cuts to Federal Government programs which in the past have compensated us for some public safety and healthcare costs associated with our position as a border state. When the Border Patrol brings injured immigrants to our hospitals without taking responsibility to pay for their care, refuses to assume any liability for immigrants who die crossing our deserts, throwing the burden of autopsies and funeral arrangements on our counties, and the federal government refuses to prosecute drug smugglers, leaving that responsibility to our state courts without any compensation to support prosecutions or incarcerations, we are forced to spend scarce state resources to meet the needs of safety and security in our communities. Some of these state concerns must be addressed if we are to have a true federal partnership particularly with the states on our international borders.

That said, Californians clearly understand that we are also the beneficiaries of the talent and work ethic brought to us by a large immigrant population. A recent Union Tribune poll shows that 70% of Californians support comprehensive reform, including development of a path to citizenship and a practical guest worker program to allow immigrants to continue their contributions to our communities. Our Universities have also done compelling research that demonstrates the net effect of immigration on the California and U.S. economies – and on our culture – has been positive.

While the precise economic impact of undocumented workers is difficult to quantify, we do know the vast majority of our undocumented workers work every day in this state and others building new homes to meet our growth needs and harvesting the crops that feed our people and

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have made California the number one agricultural producer and exporter in our nation. They also serve food in our restaurants, clean our hotels, and maintain our landscapes, all of which benefit one of our other largest industries - tourism. Proposals that would immediately deport or criminalize this population would have dramatic negative impacts on our economy.

All of these workers pay some taxes into our system. Many have payroll, income taxes, social security, and unemployment insurance deducted from their pay each week, although they are unable to collect any appropriate refunds or benefits from these deductions. They pay sales tax every time they purchase clothes and shoes for their children or appliances for their homes. They pay property tax through rent payments even if they are not homeowners. And our experience shows, their US citizen children are sure to hold higher paying jobs, pay more taxes, and many have even sacrificed their lives as members of our Armed Services.

Despite the myth that undocumented workers send all their earnings back to their home countries, corporations across America have recognized their buying power and are eagerly expanding their selling strategies to capture this growing consumer market. They work and own small businesses all of which result in expendable income those corporations are finding hard to ignore.

The current situation does have costs, as I know other witnesses will note. The largest costs to the state are probably those associated with delivery of emergency healthcare services. Since undocumented immigrants are not eligible for TANF, SSI, food stamps or many of our housing and social services programs, emergency health care is the one public program most impacted. As most immigrants, especially those without lawful permanent status, are employed by businesses who do not provide health insurance for them, we see many patients in emergency rooms who would not be there if they had access to preventive healthcare or disease management services. Accessing the healthcare system through the most costly avenue, emergency rooms, only exacerbates the financial impact. However, even with this reality, our research indicates that healthcare costs for immigrants are 55% lower than those of our native citizens.

All of this leads us, and I believe I speak for the majority of my legislative colleagues and on behalf of most of our business communities on this point, looking to Congress to create the opportunity for these hard working neighbors and employees to emerge from the shadows of our economy and expand their contributions to society. By creating a program of earned legalization as proposed by the U.S. Senate, we may fully realize the economic benefits of this population. Legalized immigrants will pay more taxes, be able to acquire health insurance to lessen the burden of uncompensated healthcare on our hospitals, and become more active participants in our society. That has been California's experience with immigrants from all nations, including those who acquired lawful permanent status and became US citizens following the 1986 passage of IRCA.

This community wants reform that works for our businesses, and our economy, and reform that is good for families.

We must allow our economy to continue growing. That demands a workforce that is skilled at different trades. The vast majority of undocumented individuals have come to this country to

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work and have proven that they work hard. It is not helpful to the California economy to outsource jobs to other countries because we are unwilling to allow the people here to do these jobs.

You have an opportunity to create meaningful reform that is based on fact and statistics, not politics of fear and rhetoric. You have an opportunity to reward those who work hard and contribute to society, instead of expending the same effort to build walls and demonize fellow human beings.

Again, I appreciate the opportunity to address your committee. It is my sincere hope that your work will yield realistic immigration policies that recognize the realities of our economy and our need for a stable workforce. We hope you will eliminate unreasonable quota restrictions requiring families to be separated for decades awaiting determination of permanent resident status, and can create a fair, clear and simplified process for periodic importation of temporary labor, if and when needed to sustain our agricultural economy.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to highlight an important policy report generated by the Border Legislative Conference, comprised of a group of legislators from US-Mexico Border states, regarding Immigration Reform. I've cited the link for the report here in my remarks and can provide a hard copy as well. The report can be accessed at:
http://www.borderlegislators.org/Meetings/XIII%20Monterrey/Immigration%20Policy%20Statement.pdf

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