

**Opening Statement of Chairman Thomas R. Carper  
“Border Security: Examining the Implications of S. 1691,  
the Border Patrol Agent Pay Reform Act of 2013”  
June 9, 2014**

*Prepared for delivery:*

My thanks to my colleagues and our witnesses for working with my staff and me to quickly put this hearing together. The purpose of this hearing is to examine the merits of S. 1691, the Border Patrol Agent Pay Reform Act of 2014, introduced by Senators Tester and McCain and cosponsored by Senators Heitkamp and Ayotte. This bill would make badly needed reforms to the overtime system at the Border Patrol, which is currently too complicated and too difficult to manage.

Before we get into the bill, however, I want to briefly talk about what’s currently happening along our border. Over the past few years, we have seen a surge in unauthorized migration from Central America, which is nearing record highs. An unprecedented number of the people we are apprehending at the border are unaccompanied children.

Our laws—appropriately—require that these vulnerable children be treated differently than other migrants. They must be transferred to the Department of Health and Human Services, and there are strict rules about their care. Secretary Johnson, last week, announced that he was creating an interagency task-force and devoting additional resources to coordinate the care and resettling of these children. I commend that announcement.

Since I became Chairman of this Committee 18 months ago, I have visited the Southern border with Mexico in Arizona and Texas multiple times. I’ve seen first-hand the crowded conditions in our Border Patrol stations in the Rio Grande Valley. I’ve also visited Mexico, Guatemala, and El Salvador. What I have come to understand is that what happens along our borders is only a symptom of the problem—not its underlying cause.

Today’s hearing will focus on how we can better address one of these symptoms by increasing enforcement. The Tester/McCain bill we are examining today will save taxpayers money, and increase our ability to patrol—and secure—our borders. In fact, one estimate I have seen shows that this bill would add the equivalent of 1,400 agents to the border.

Given the challenges we face on the border—which have only been underscored by recent events—I have to say that moving this bill seems like a no-brainer to me. I fully support moving forward with this bill as soon as possible.

While we need to do all that we can to treat these symptoms, we cannot stop there. It is critical that we understand and address the root causes of why people will risk everything to come here in the first place. Based on what I have seen in my trips to some of these countries, those root causes are the lack of economic opportunity and the deteriorating security situation in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.

Nearly one year ago, the Senate passed a bipartisan, comprehensive immigration reform that addresses many of the root causes of undocumented immigration. While the bill isn't perfect, it is a significant improvement over the status quo and provides our nation with an important opportunity to fix our broken immigration system—and grow our economy by almost one trillion dollars. But in order for this solution to become law, we need our colleagues in the House to act.

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