

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Thomas R. Carper
“Deferred Action on Immigration: Implications and Unanswered Questions”
February 4, 2015

As prepared for delivery:

We are here today to learn more about the implementation of the President’s executive actions on immigration. I think that is fair and reasonable oversight for this Committee. As with any new government initiative, there are likely to be a variety of bureaucratic challenges that must be addressed. So I look forward to hearing from all of our witnesses about the challenges that might lie ahead, as well as some possible solutions.

Last Congress, this Committee – and the entire Senate – spent a great deal of time examining our nation’s broken immigration system. After months of debate, two-thirds of the Senate – both Democrats and Republicans – came together to pass a comprehensive immigration reform bill.

The bill was not perfect, but it addressed a number of issues that have plagued our immigration system for years. Perhaps just as important, it would have also reduced our budget deficit by nearly \$200 billion over the next 10 years and by an additional \$700 billion over the following 10 years. Moreover, it would have grown our gross domestic product by as much as five percent over the next 20 years.

As we know, unfortunately, the House did not act on that legislation. As a result, we continue to be left with a broken immigration system that meets neither our economic nor our security needs. Faced with paralysis here in Congress and the continued inefficiency and unfairness in our immigration system, the President decided to try and make several temporary improvements, hoping it would spur those of us in the Congress to finish the job we began almost two years ago. Those improvements – or changes – were not meant to be permanent, but they are what bring us to this debate today.

Look, I know that many of our colleagues have strong misgivings about the President acting on his own on these matters. Nonetheless, I hope we can set aside any frustration over tactics and look at the substance of what the Administration is trying to do. If we can find a way to do that, I think we just might find room for common ground at the end of the day. After all, that’s what the American people sent us here to do.

There are more than 11 million people living in this country without documentation. We would not be able to remove them all even if we wanted to try – and we shouldn’t try. Some of these individuals are young adults brought here as children with no choice of their own in the matter. They are American in every way, except on paper. Others are productive and law-abiding parents of U.S. citizens or legal residents who have lived here for decades.

Allowing these folks who live in our communities to work legally and pay full taxes will be good for both our economy and for our federal budget. In fact, the Council of Economic Advisers estimated that these new Administration initiatives, along with other immigration policies announced in November, would increase our nation’s gross domestic product by \$90 billion over

the next 10 years. These changes would also lead to a decrease in federal deficits by somewhere between \$25 billion and \$60 billion over the next 10 years.

Blocking or repealing the Administration's initiatives would take us backwards. In fact, just last week, the Congressional Budget Office reported that the House bill to block these deferred deportation programs that the Senate declined to take up and consider yesterday would cost our economy \$7.5 billion over ten years.

Estimates indicate that more than 4 million immigrants will be eligible for the temporary deportation relief outlined by the President. While not all of those eligible are expected to apply, many will, and that will allow the Administration to focus its limited enforcement resources on the highest priorities for removal – those who pose security risks or recent arrivals without longstanding ties to our country. That is more than enough work for our border security and immigration enforcement officials to handle – even at the record deportation levels we have seen in recent years.

So, in sum, based on what we know so far, I have come to the conclusion that the initiatives whose implementation we're examining today are feasible, are fair, make good economic sense, and actually enhance our nation's security. Whether you agree with that or not, these initiatives are interim steps. They are not final steps. Those are the ones we need to take by doing the hard work of rebuilding the consensus that allowed two-thirds of the Senate to support compromise immigration reform legislation some two years ago.

As I close, let me thank the Chairman for calling this hearing. While there is considerable disagreement about what the President has done, I hope we can all agree that this hearing is the proper forum to have a debate on immigration policy.

I do not believe we should be threatening to shut down the Department of Homeland Security – an agency vital to our nation's security – over disagreements with the President's policies. All three former Homeland Security secretaries – two of them Republicans, one of them a Democrat – agree with me on that point.

In the next several days, I hope that most of us can come together to do what I believe is the right thing – support the passage of a clean, full-year appropriation for the Department of Homeland Security by February 27th and then get to work to pass a thoughtful, comprehensive immigration reform bill that is worthy of this body in which all of us are privileged to serve.