



**Congresswoman Barbara Lee
Statement for Hearing on Immigration reform
November 8, 2007**

Thank you, Chairwoman Lofgren for holding this important hearing today. And let me thank my colleague Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee for inviting me to join this accomplished panel to share our perspectives on immigration.

Also, thank you for your strong leadership and unwavering commitment to one of the most important issues facing America today: ensuring that our immigration system works.

Even though America is a nation of immigrants, we may have different views of what immigration means to America. To me, immigration is an issue of family values, opportunity, and at it's core, an issue of civil rights.

My view is shaped by my personal history. I grew up in an El Paso border town and lived and learned in a community of immigrants. I attended college and university in and now am lucky enough to represent another community of immigrants, the Ninth District of California.

I have always known and valued the contributions of immigrant communities. I know that immigrants have contributed immeasurably to American ingenuity, innovation, and the economy.

Still, I understand that we may have different histories and exposure to immigrants and their contributions to our nation. We may have different views on what immigration means to America's future. But what we can all agree on is that the current system of immigration is not meeting the current needs.

As the Co-Chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, I'm proud to share that the Caucus has outlined a series of principles to sum up our position on immigration and immigration reform. Simply put, we must have a fair and equitable immigration policy that provides a well defined and time bound path way to permanent residency and citizenship.

More specifically, the Progressive Caucus believes that comprehensive immigration reform must include:

- A clear legal path to permanent residency and citizenship for all the millions of undocumented workers and their immediate families;
- a policy that works to unite families and not to separate children from their parents;
- a system that is timely and straightforward without charging excessive fees or fines that are out of the reach for immigrant families;
- the ability for children to pursue an education, and have access to student loans and in-state tuition;
- a system that minimizes mandatory and indefinite detention of non-citizens and safeguards the Universal Human Rights of every person;
- a plan that provides for the equitable and non-discriminatory enforcement of

laws that does not make first responders like firemen and police into immigration agents;

- encouragement for employers to hire citizens and legal residents first, but does not make them into immigration officers either;
- a strong and sensible border security plan to ensure the safety of our country

In the same vein, I'm pleased to share the perspective of the Congressional Black Caucus for which I'm honored to serve as Vice-Chair under the leadership of our friend and colleague Congresswoman Kilpatrick.

The CBC's immigration reform goals also include a call for a pathway for earned access to citizenship that focuses on the reunification of families and provides a pathway for permanency for every immigrant in America.

The Congressional Black caucus also understands that we must not allow outdated policies to unfairly discriminate between immigrants from one part of the world from another.

This is why I am pleased that you, Chairwoman Jackson-Lee have introduced, H.R. 750, the Save America Comprehensive Immigration Act of 2007. H.R. 750 provides a platform to move America forward by providing a new framework to acknowledge the cultural and economic benefit that immigration provides for all Americans.

This bill will strengthen the focus on family reunification, provide the flexibility for the Department of Homeland Security to make status adjustments for immigrants who have been in the US for at least 5 years. It will also increase the level of diversity immigrants worldwide and fixes the unfair provisions that apply to citizens of Haiti and Liberia. In short this legislation represents an important step forward towards bringing our immigration policy into the 21st century.

We have all heard the fear-mongering from some parts and the bottom line is that we must stop playing politics with immigration. We must focus on legislation that will get this country headed in a direction that will make sense for everyone.

Madam Chair, I am here today to urge this committee to support a fair and moral comprehensive immigration plan and to support an end to the attacks on hard-working, law-abiding members of our immigrant community, our American community.

Again Congresswoman Jackson Lee thank you for your leadership and your vision on this issue and I look forward to working with you as we craft a solution to this important challenge.