



IMMIGRATION

Reid and Pelosi: Spin Doesn't Change the Mean-Spirited House Republican Immigration Bill

Washington, DC--(HISPANIC PR WIRE)--April 18, 2006--Senate Democratic Leader Harry Reid and House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi today released the following statement on Speaker Hastert and Leader Frist's support of the Sensenbrenner amendment, which would criminalize an entire population of immigrants:

“Speaker Hastert and Leader Frist’s statement on immigration this week is a clear reflection that Republicans now feel the heat from the American people on the mean-spirited approach of the House Republican immigration bill, H.R. 4437, authored by Congressman James Sensenbrenner.

“The statement serves to underline a key fact: that the Republican Leaders of both the House and Senate support the criminalization of an entire population of immigrants by expressing support of an amendment that would have authorized 6-month jail sentences.

“No amount of spin by the Republican leadership can change the fact that the Sensenbrenner bill – including the felony provision – was authored by Republicans and ultimately passed by Republicans.

“The fact is that Congressman Sensenbrenner’s amendment, if adopted, would have still criminalized an entire population for the first time in our history, rather than charging presence violations as civil offenses as provided under current law. 11 million men, women, and children, with no exceptions, would still go to jail for up to six months under the revised Sensenbrenner amendment. That is why many Democrats voted against the Sensenbrenner amendment.

“As we consider immigration reform, Democrats believe that we must protect and defend the American people by protecting our borders. As we do so, we must also protect and defend our values as Americans with comprehensive, humane, and realistic immigration reform. It is imperative to our national security, and it is the right thing to do.

“In contrast to these goals, we regret that Speaker Hastert and Leader Frist’s statement indicates that the Republican leadership and your Republican allies support authorizing 6-month jail sentences for an entire population and that turns 11 million men, women, and children—among the poorest and hardest working people in our country – into criminals.

“We are a better country than that. We must work together for real, bipartisan comprehensive immigration reform that protects our borders, honors our values, and that we can all be proud of. The Sensenbrenner bill fails miserably and is antithetical to our basic values as a country. We will continue to vigorously oppose it.”



FACTS ABOUT HOUSE ACTION ON IMMIGRATION LEGISLATION

Background: A recent Press Statement by the Speaker and Senate Majority Leader makes the false claim that House Democrats “voted to make felons out of all of those who remain in our country illegally.” (Speaker Hastert and Senate Majority Leader Frist Joint Statement on Border Security Bill, April 11, 2006) House Judiciary Committee Chairman Jim Sensenbrenner further rewrote the history of his own bill in an April 5 letter stating, “A felony penalty is neither appropriate nor workable.” (April 5 Letter to U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops)

FACT: If Republicans thought this was inappropriate and unworkable, why did they put in their own bill? The Republican bill, as introduced and authored by House Judiciary Chairman Sensenbrenner, makes it a felony to be unlawfully present in the United States. Under current law, such unlawful presence results in a civil fine. (Section 203 of HR 4437, as introduced).

FACT: The Section by Section Analysis of the bill, released by Chairman Sensenbrenner when the bill was introduced, states that the bill “makes illegal presence in the United States a crime, and expands the penalties for aliens who illegally enter the U.S.”

FACT: If Republicans thought this bill didn’t work, why did they pass it with the felony provision on a party line vote in the Judiciary Committee and on a largely party line vote on the House floor? [Roll Call No. 3, Judiciary Committee Markup of HR 4437, December 8, 2005; Roll Call 661, December 16, 2005 (all but 17 Republicans voted aye)].

FACT: If Republicans thought this was inappropriate and unworkable, why did Chairman Sensenbrenner defend this provision in the Rules Committee right before the House considered it?

Mr. Putnam: It is a civil offense to be here, but if this passes, we will have 11 million new felons?

Mr. Sensenbrenner: That is correct...the fact of the matter is that current penalties do not sufficiently act as a deterrent against illegal immigration. We have got to have penalties that are strong enough

Mr. Putnam: [a] 17-year old girl, if the bill passes, is it correct by virtue of the fact that she was brought here illegally as a 6-month old baby, she would be a felon, and if the law were enforced, she would have [to] be incarcerated? Is that correct?

Mr. Sensenbrenner: I believe it is. [Transcript of Rules Committee Emergency Hearing on HR 4437, December 14, 2005, pps. 42-45]

FACT: If Republicans thought this was inappropriate and unworkable, why did Chairman Sensenbrenner’s spokesman say the purpose of the provision was to “encourage people who are here illegally to respect the laws and leave...the bill makes illegal presence in the U.S. a crime, no matter how you happened to come.”? [“Illegal Immigration Could be a Felony,” LA Times, December 15, 2005]

FACT: The Sensenbrenner amendment to his own bill, which Republicans are now pointing to their support of in an effort to rewrite history, would have – for the first time – criminalized out of status immigrants by creating a



new 6 month jail term for immigrants. That is why many House Democrats opposed it.

Contact:

Federico A. de Jesús, Reid

202-224-2939

or

Jim Manley / Rebecca Kirszner, Reid

202-224-2939

or

Brendan Daly / Jennifer Crider, Pelosi

202-226-7616