

Letter from SC State Senator Jim Ritchie

Dear _____,

Thank you very much for your recent correspondence regarding the illegal immigration crisis facing our nation and our state. I appreciate your concern and can assure you that I am doing everything I can to address this urgent matter.

As you may know, I chair the Senate's Illegal Immigration Reform Study Committee. Our committee began its aggressive work on this issue in Summer 2006. Over the course of six months, the Study Committee held six public hearings on illegal immigration's effects on South Carolina. We heard from dozens of federal and state officials in the areas of customs and immigration, law enforcement, education, and other public services. The Study Committee received testimony from expert academics on the state's authority to enact state immigration reforms.

Additionally, we heard from over 100 citizens and interest groups.

After extensive hearings and review of this matter we introduced the Illegal Immigration Reform Act, S. 392. Our plan is aggressive, thorough and one of the toughest in the country. S. 392 passed the Senate in April 2007 and has garnered wide-ranging support. More importantly, it will do everything we can as a state to protect our communities and the interests of South Carolina taxpayers.

Unfortunately, our bill languished in the House Judiciary Committee after its Senate approval and was not debated or even considered in the seven weeks between its House introduction and the end of the 2007 legislative session.

In an effort to encourage the people of South Carolina to get involved and have their voice heard, I held five town hall meetings across South Carolina during the legislative break. I learned a lot from the views and experiences of my fellow citizens and was humbled by their support.

The people of this state reaffirmed my commitment to finding real answers to this problem. I know all too well the effects of illegal immigration on our state. In just fourteen years (1990-2004), the number of illegal immigrants in South Carolina increased by 1,000 percent. Today, approximately 200,000 illegal aliens are living in the Palmetto State. It is estimated that three out of four Latinos in South Carolina either cannot communicate effectively or have poor English skills.

As a result, South Carolina taxpayers spend nearly \$186 million each year on illegal immigrants to provide education, emergency medical care and to incarcerate the criminal element, which grew by 70 percent over a recent four-year period.

What's worse, Congress requires our state to bear these costs while they put off reforms. This is a very real crisis. Facing this reality, my Senate colleagues are committed to passing state legislation within the first 30 days of session.

You can imagine our disappointment when we heard that, rather than using our bill as a vehicle to address this issue, members of the House of Representatives introduced a new immigration bill last week. Not surprisingly, their bill is nearly identical to our proposal. Their decision to start from scratch and make you wait even longer for results is about one thing and one thing only "political grandstanding.

The people of South Carolina should not have to tolerate election year politics when it comes to their security and safety. Fortunately, many folks like you are demanding the House leadership to put aside personal ambitions and use the Senate-passed bill as a tool for change. I was encouraged to learn that the House Judiciary Committee has heeded your call- they have sent the bill to the full House of Representatives for consideration. I look forward to the constructive amendments and am hopeful that, together, we can bring about real solutions for the safety and security of every South Carolinian.

To be sure, state action alone cannot solve this matter. Our actions will provide critical aid to South Carolina, but only Congress has the authority and the duty to solve the larger issues of border security and citizenship. Unfortunately, they have repeatedly failed to fulfill that duty. Thankfully, the Constitution provides a remedy when Congress is unwilling or unable to address an urgent national problem - the states can come together to find solutions.

To that end, I have joined Senator McConnell's call for a constitutional convention on illegal immigration (S. 856). Hopefully, our efforts will spur federal action well before a convention occurs. (Note: To learn more about a constitutional convention you may wish to visit AmericanAmendment.com.) As the chair of the Judiciary subcommittee that first studied the bill, I was pleased that our actions reaffirmed the Senate's commitment to moving forward with new ideas and innovative strategies to combat the costs placed on our society and our wallets by illegal immigration.

No need is more fundamental than securing our borders and protecting our citizens against the massive flood of illegal immigrants who are now invading our nation and our state. South Carolinians cannot afford to either depend solely on state legislation to resolve this crisis or merely hope for federal reforms. While we continue to lead the fight to keep South Carolina from becoming the Southeastern haven for illegal aliens 'hope our federal government finally gets the message.

With warmest regards,

Jim