

5/23/07

The Honorable Max Baucus
United States Senate
511 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510-2602

Senator Baucus,

The Montana Human Rights Network is writing you today to address the issue of comprehensive immigration reform. On Saturday, May 19th in the Helena Independent Record, you stated, “I do not support amnesty for illegal aliens, and any immigrant who wants to become a citizen must pay back taxes, learn English, and go to the back of the line.”

These statements deeply concern us. We urge you to support just and comprehensive immigration reform policies that value family unification and respect the contributions that undocumented workers make to the United States economy. There are many families that would be torn apart by touch back provisions, or as you put it, “go[ing] to the back of the line.”

As you work on just and comprehensive immigration reform policies, please also remember that undocumented immigrants and refugees pay an array of local, state and federal taxes in various forms and are a vital part of the United States economy. However, these immigrants and refugees are not able to access the majority of services which they help to fund with their tax contributions. This is clearly unfair to hardworking people who help keep our country running.

Additionally, your use of the phrase “back of the line” is concerning, given the historic practice in this country of requiring black Americans to sit in the “back of the bus.” Whatever your intention may have been, the language plays right in to the racial overtones that are sure to plague the debate on immigration.

We urge you to support a just and comprehensive immigration reform policy. We do not believe the current “compromise bill” before the U.S. Senate meets this standard. Rather, we urge you to support a policy that brings our undocumented neighbors, co-workers and friends out of the shadows and allows them to fully participate in society. Immigration is an American experience and acceptance is an American value. Please remember this as you embark on the hard work of crafting just and comprehensive immigration reform policies.

The Network has taken a leading role in the effort to educate and organize around immigration reform in the state of Montana. During the debates that will take place on this issue in the coming months, you should expect to hear from our organization and our members. We would be happy to discuss our views on just and comprehensive immigration reform and the “compromise bill” at your convenience.

Sincerely,

Christine Kaufmann
Executive Director
Montana Human Rights Network