



July 27, 2009

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Chairman - Immigration, Refugees,
and Border Security Subcommittee
224 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Ranking Member John Cornyn
Chairman - Immigration, Refugees,
and Border Security Subcommittee
152 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Schumer and Ranking Member Cornyn:

I am writing to convey the American Meat Institute's (AMI) strong support for achieving passage of comprehensive immigration reform legislation in the 111th Congress. AMI is supportive of comprehensive immigration reform legislation that addresses practical employee verification, an earned-legalization process for workers in the United States, and a viable expanded employment visa program that can be used for full-time, non-seasonal jobs. These provisions would enhance border security and provide long-term benefits to our economy by stabilizing the current labor force and creating an additional pool of potential workers.

As you may know, the meat industry was one of the earliest adopters of E-Verify in 1997, when it was only available as a "pilot program" in a few states. AMI and its members fought to make E-Verify available on a voluntary basis to all employers in all states. Since it became available, E-Verify has been embraced by the vast majority of meat and poultry companies in the U.S.

Unfortunately, the current system fails to provide a fail safe mechanism to detect identity theft when an imposter uses another person's name and social security number. E-Verify cannot determine whether the person presenting a valid name and social security number is the person to whom the card belongs. As a result, law abiding employers often end up hiring unauthorized workers even though they complied with the law.

In AMI's view, Congress must act to improve the E-Verify program and address the problems inherent with identity theft. The number of documents that can be presented at the hiring point must be reduced and a biometric element must be incorporated into the program to enable employers to determine if documents presented relate to the individual presenting them.

Given the nearly 12 years of experience the meat and poultry industry has with using E-Verify, AMI also believes that Congress should mandate E-Verify for employers once these changes are addressed, phasing in universal participation over several years to better enable the government to administer the program, and launching a pilot biometric component directed at eliminating identity theft on a voluntary, fee for service basis.

An employment verification program is like an immunization initiative: it only works effectively if implemented across the board. When applied in a patchwork fashion as it has been,

the system is vulnerable. We believe it is in the national interest – and in the interest of all employers – that this program become routine, not just a program used by a fraction of businesses.

Thank you for your leadership on the important issue of comprehensive immigration and for this opportunity to present our position on E-Verify. To assist the process, we would be pleased to meet with you and Committee staff to articulate with much greater specificity our position and legislative ideas.

Respectfully submitted,

J. Patrick Boyle
President and CEO