OFFICES OF THE GOVERNORS

ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER JANET NAPOLITANO

June 13, 2006

The Honorable J. Dennis Hastert
Speaker of the House
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Minority Leader
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Speaker Hastert and Leader Pelosi,

Western governors have been meeting this past weekend and over the next two days will continue to discuss many important issues of mutual concern, one of which is the need for comprehensive immigration reform. We are encouraged that Congress is continuing to debate comprehensive immigration reform and urge your strong leadership to bring resolution to this important issue before Congress adjourns this year.

Border security and immigration reform are the exclusive jurisdiction of the federal government. Despite this, our states are now actively working with the federal government to help secure the border region. Moreover, our states continue to pay enormous costs associated with illegal immigration.

Our own National Guard troops will be deploying in missions along the border to support, and therefore free up, the personnel and resources of the United States Border Patrol. However, full implementation of border and immigration security measures will take time.

In the immediate term, the federal government should assume its responsibility for reimbursing states and local governments for the burden imposed by illegal immigration. The 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) set a precedent for a statutory reimbursement on a temporary basis. The State Legalization Impact Assistance Grants (SLIAG) program was created "to lessen the financial impact on State and local governments resulting from the adjustment of immigration status under the Act of certain aliens in the states."

The Senate-passed legislation included a similar state-impact assistance program. This is a good first step. However, the Senate measure generates billions of dollars that are almost entirely allocated back to the federal government. We believe states should receive a far greater share of these funds. Our states are currently burdened with billions of dollars in annual costs for services provided to undocumented immigrants. We believe that heavily impacted state and local governments should receive sufficient federal funds to offset our general fund costs for health care, state and local prisons and education. As the issues are worked out within the comprehensive reform measures between both houses, it is our expectation that any monies collected in fees or fines associated with the process of legal immigration be appropriately provided to offset the tremendous financial burden placed on Border States.

Beyond this, we urge you to continue your commitment to the State Criminal Alien Assistance Program (SCAAP), which reimburses states for costs associated with the incarceration of criminal aliens. It is important that funding be provided, as has been done in the past, but at a higher level to address the enormous costs associated with the incarceration of illegal immigrants.

Just as we are now deploying our National Guard troops to the border, we stand committed and ready to work with the federal government to protect our nation and develop a comprehensive solution to immigration reform. As governors of states who bear an ever-growing burden due to illegal entries along our international border, we urge your support for impact assistance to offset these costs. Please let us know if we can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

Arnold Schwarzenegger

Janet Napolitano