

Sen. Heller predicts immigration reform bill will pass U.S. House if it gets floor vote, says entire Nevada delegation will vote for it

8:36 pm, Feb 19, 2014 | Written by Ray Hagar

Sen. Dean Heller, one of 14 Republicans to vote for comprehensive immigration reform in the U.S. Senate, predicted Wednesday in Reno that immigration reform would pass the U.S. House of Representatives if the issue gets a final vote on the House floor.

Heller, speaking to an immigration forum sponsored by “Mi Familia Vota,” the Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada, Justice for Immigrants, Catholic Diocese of Reno, and others, said the entire Nevada delegation in the House would vote for the measure in a floor vote.

“To get something done by the end of the year, I’m optimistic. I’m optimistic,” Heller told the crowd in the cafeteria at Pine Middle School in Reno. “Their (House) leadership is optimistic. They’ve got some push back. But I will tell you this in closing: I believe as I stand in front of you today, if you put comprehensive immigration reform on the floor of the House of Representative, it would pass today.”

Heller’s comments were greeted with loud applause.

“And I will make this bold prediction,” Heller continued. “That when and if this bill gets to the House floor, I do believe it will pass and every member of our House delegation will vote for it.”

Heller again had to shout over the applause, saying, “I think that is very possible and it sends a strong message coming from the state of Nevada.”

Heller left the meeting shortly after his speech. He told the crowd Rep. Mark Amodei, R-Carson City, was not at the immigration forum because he was suffering from an eye issue.

“I wish Congressman Amodei was here,” Heller said. “The reason he is not here is because he has a detached retina and he’s back in the hospital for a third time to get this fixed.”

Amodei’s representative, Arturo Garzon, said Amodei was supportive but stopped short in saying whether or not Amodei would vote for comprehensive immigration reform in a vote on the House floor.

“He wants everyone to know that as soon as a bill comes to the floor he is willing, obviously, to review what is in the bill,” Garzon said. “And like I said earlier, he supports a comprehensive immigration bill.”

Democratic State Treasurer Kate Marshall dropped a little known fact to the crowd. Her father’s family came to the United States after fighting for Pancho Villa – the famous Mexican revolutionary general – in the early 20th century. Villa is mostly remembered for his raid on U.S. soil, in 1916 at Columbus, N.M.

“My father’s family came here from Mexico in 1920, and not because they really wanted to,” said Marshall, a candidate for Nevada secretary of state. “My father’s family fought with Pancho Villa. And if you know your Mexican history, he lost. And so they went lickity-split over the border, OK?”

Marshall gave her remarks in fluent Spanish, before also speaking in English.

Both Heller and Marshall said it was important that immigration laws do not split families.

“We need immigration reform that is both practical and just,” Marshall said. “This is the United States. In this country, we all work hard. But we also deserve to have opportunity, dignity, and security for all our families. In our country, I think it is all possible.”

Heller told the crowd that on the day the U.S. Senate passed its immigration bill, “I think the nation changed.”

He noted many in the audience had called his office to voice their opinion on the reform bill. He spoke about immigration reform in terms of Republican values.

“I think it is an economic driver,” Heller said. “I think it is good for business. It is good for agriculture and it is good for high-tech.”

It is sound economically to support comprehensive immigration reform, said Andres Ramirez , president of the Ramirez Group, and one of the panelists of the forum.

“Whether you are talking to the Cato Institute, which is a Libertarian institute, or the Center for American Progress, which is a progressive group, they will tell you that taxes from a comprehensive immigration bill would generate tens of billions of dollars to the economy of our nation.”