



## BACKGROUND BRIEFING: Senator Jeff Sessions (R-AL)

Newest Ranking Member of the Senate Judiciary Committee

**... & just one degree of separation from anti-immigrant hate groups and white nationalists**

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### → A history of hate:

Senator Jeff Sessions is one of the leading (and loudest) voices against comprehensive immigration reform in the United States Senate. He unabashedly attacks immigration reform – and immigrants. In the Senate, Sessions takes every opportunity to denounce comprehensive immigration reform, often in incendiary terms. No wonder. Senator Sessions' allies in the anti-immigration movement are confirmed hate groups, originating from the white nationalist mastermind, John Tanton. The leading GOP Senator on the Judiciary Committee has aligned himself with people and entities that bash immigrants and make hate a priority.



Photo Credit: <http://sessions.senate.gov/images/photoalbum/Dobbs1.jpeg>

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### → What Sessions has said:

Sessions has used the Senate as a bully pulpit from which to spew anti-immigrant rhetoric. His voting record is solidly anti-immigrant, but his speeches truly give him away. [In a June 27, 2007 floor statement](#) on the Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2007, Sessions played the “terrorist” card:

All of those people, including the current chairman of the association of retired Border Patrol officers, have criticized this bill in the most severe manner, saying it is a slap in the face to people who followed the law, saying it will not work, saying the 24-hour name check is not going to work at all, and will not provide security to our country, that it will actually be a benefit to terrorists. I am not saying this; they said this. It would be a benefit to terrorists. One called it the ‘Terrorist Relief Act,’ or something to that effect.

In that same floor statement on the Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2007, Sessions also called the bill the “Terrorist Assistance and Facilitation Act of 2007.”

When he wasn't using the “terror” card, Sessions had another bogus claim up his sleeve: Child molesters. According to [a June 2007 press release](#) from Sessions office citing 20 loopholes in the Senate immigration bill,

“Loophole 6 - Some Child Molesters Are Still Eligible: Some aggravated felons - those who have sexually abused a minor - are eligible for amnesty.”

And, when he didn't have those cards, Sessions relied on “the fence,” saying in [October of 2006](#), “I applaud President Bush for signing into law legislation that authorizes the construction of 700 miles of fencing along our southern border with Mexico. As I said several times during the immigration debate, good fences make good neighbors.”

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## → Sessions' courtship of anti-immigrant extremism:

Sessions is never without a quip on immigration. But, one might ask, where does he get his information?

Sessions has close relations with the three leading anti-immigrant groups: [the Center for Immigration Studies](#) (CIS), [NumbersUSA](#) and the [Federation for American Immigration Reform](#) (FAIR.) He often quotes their work and regularly appears at their events. And, they return the favor.

On a [“Fox & Friends” segment on March 10, 2009](#), Sessions railed because a highly questionable Center for Immigration Studies report claimed that some of the stimulus bill could help illegal immigrants, “The amazing thing is that the president has suspended, by executive order, the implementation of a requirement that the E-Verify computer Social Security verification system, that was to be employed for every contractor who gets government money, that's been put off until May, so we're not now checking to find out whether or not they are legal or illegal, and that means that a large percentage of these workers are going to be illegal.”

Last year, NumbersUSA named Sessions its [“2008 Defender of the Rule of Law.”](#) On May 5, 2009, NumbersUSA issued a press release welcoming Sessions' ascension to his new role on the Senate Judiciary, claiming the Alabama Senator is the [“the No. 1 champion for the American workers on immigration issues.”](#) NumbersUSA's claim is clearly not consistent with Sessions' [anti-labor voting record](#).

FAIR commended Sessions' stand to “protect American workers in the Senate immigration debate.” And, in an April 2006 press release FAIR was effusive in its praise of the Alabama Senator, “The Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR), the nation's oldest and most influential immigration reform organization, applauds the efforts of Alabama Senator Jeff Sessions for his critical role in blocking an ill-conceived and damaging illegal alien amnesty and guest worker program.” [\[FAIR Press Release, 4/19/06\]](#).

Actually, the anti-immigrant groups did more than applaud. The anti-immigrant political action committee, [the U.S Immigration Reform PAC](#), (whose President is John Tanton's wife, Mary Lou), gave \$1,000 to Sessions during the 2007-2008 election cycle. That may not sound like much, but the PAC only contributed \$17,500 to all federal congressional candidates during the 08 cycle. The PAC had given Sessions \$1000 in 95-96, too.

Sessions has been a key figure at the Center for Immigration Studies for years. He's appeared at CIS press conferences and, back in [June of 2003](#), was on a panel moderated by the group's Executive Director, Mark Krikorian, on the issue of local law enforcement and immigration.

Sessions appears with leaders of the organizations at other events, too. He participated In American Legion Forum on illegal immigration in [March of 2007](#), which discussed ways, “to deal with this country's population of illegal aliens.” Speakers included Roy Beck, President of NumbersUSA and Mark Krikorian, Executive Director of the Center for Immigration Studies.

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## → Why Sessions' relationship with CIS, NumbersUSA, and FAIR matters:

The mastermind of the anti-immigration movement is [John Tanton](#).

The Center for Immigration Studies and NumbersUSA were started with Tanton's help and he founded FAIR. So Tanton, who has long-standing and well-established ties to white nationalist groups, had a role in the creation all three groups -- and all of three groups' leaders worked for Tanton.

FAIR, which regularly praised Sessions, has been designated an [anti-immigrant hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center](#). That might make some members of Congress think twice about developing a relationship with the group, but clearly not Jeff Sessions.

[The SPLC](#) recently issued [a report](#) on Tanton and his ties to the anti-immigrant groups:

Three Washington, D.C. organizations most responsible for blocking comprehensive immigration reform in 2007 are part of a network of groups created by a man who has been at the heart of the white nationalist movement for decades, according to a report issued today by the Southern Poverty Law Center.

The Nativist Lobby: Three Faces of Intolerance [full report [here](#)] describes how the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR), the Center for Immigration Studies (CIS) and NumbersUSA were founded and funded by John Tanton, a retired Michigan ophthalmologist who operates a racist publishing company and has written that to maintain American culture, "a European-American majority" is required.

"These groups have infiltrated the mainstream by presenting themselves as legitimate commentators, when, in reality, they were all conceived by a man who is convinced that non-white immigrants threaten America," said Mark Potok, director of the SPLC's Intelligence Project. "They have never strayed far from their roots."

The report examines how Tanton, who still sits on FAIR's board of directors, founded the racist Social Contract Press and has corresponded with Holocaust deniers, white nationalist intellectuals and Klan lawyers for decades — correspondence documented by his own writings stored at a University of Michigan library.

These groups cater to the most extreme elements in the anti-immigration world. Unfortunately, Senator Sessions has found a home in that world.

It's disturbing that the new Ranking Member on the Senate Judiciary Committee has very close ties to hate groups and white nationalists. More disturbing is that his colleagues in the Senate minority find nothing wrong with that.

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## → Conclusion

When the debate on comprehensive immigration reform comes before the Judiciary Committee, Senator Sessions and his colleagues in the minority will have the choice of whether to stand with these extreme groups and obstruct solutions to our broken immigration system or to move America forward.

Given Senator Sessions' history, Americans will need to watch closely to make sure hate is no longer given a megaphone in this critical policy debate.