



SEN. JEFF SESSIONS (R-AL)

“All our staff has been working for days trying to decipher this gobbledygook. And I’m told that you read it two, three times, and you get a different insight each time you read it.” – Senator Sessions about Gang of 8 Immigration Bill, Senate Judiciary Committee meeting, [April 26, 2013](#)

Senator Sessions has an ugly history with race relations and civil rights, once joking that (in the words of a [New Republic](#) profile) he “used to think [the KKK] were ok’ until he found out some of them were ‘pot smokers’” and calling the 1965 Voting Rights Act an “piece of intrusive legislation.” Sessions also has a history of [opposing immigrants and immigration reform](#). When Alabama passed its state self-deportation law, [HB 56](#), and Sessions was asked about how the law had left Hispanic children too afraid to go to school, his only comment was that the kids [shouldn’t have been here in the first place](#). Sessions is closely affiliated with anti-immigrant groups like NumbersUSA—his former longtime chief of staff, [David Armand DeKeyser](#), is now a lobbyist for a firm often [employed](#) by NumbersUSA. And in May 2012, Sen. Sessions entered a statement into the Congressional record congratulating NumbersUSA on its [15th anniversary](#)—an honor the famously nativist Rep. Tom Tancredo (R-CO) had paid the organization [five years earlier](#). These days Senator Sessions is trying to kill immigration reform by stalling it—first by [writing a letter](#) to Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Pat Leahy (D-VT) asking him to slow down the legislative process, and then by repeatedly claiming that the bill is incomprehensible and makes no sense.

[Ties to Anti-Immigrant Groups](#)

Sen. Jeff Sessions has a number of personal relationships with [John Tanton network groups](#) NumbersUSA, the Center for Immigration Studies, and FAIR, making use of a lobbying-to-legislation revolving door that benefits both him and the groups. In the 112th Congress ([2011](#) and [2012](#)), NumbersUSA contracted with four separate firms to do their lobbying work: the [Majority Group LLC](#), [MITA Group](#), [Duetto Group](#), and [Timothy R. Rupli & Associates](#). Coincidentally, one of the MITA lobbyists was [David Armand DeKeyser](#), a former longtime Sessions staff member. DeKeyser worked for Sen. Sessions back when the Senator was still a [U.S. Attorney](#) in Mobile, Alabama, then later followed Sessions to Washington, where he served as the [Senator’s chief of staff](#) from 1997 to 2005. Another MITA Group lobbyist, [James Edwards, Jr.](#), is also a [Fellow](#) at the Center for Immigration Studies—and appeared alongside Sessions at a [2003 CIS press conference](#) moderated by CIS Executive Director Mark Krikorian. These ties have proved [financially useful](#) to Sessions—the last time the Senator ran for reelection, in 2008, David Armand DeKeyser contributed [\\$2,000](#) to his campaign, while James Edwards, Jr. [donated \\$500](#). Timothy Rupli of NumbersUSA lobbying firm Timothy R. Rupli & Associates went even further, contributing \$1500 to Sessions (as documented [here](#) and [here](#)) as well as holding a [\\$1000/plate fundraiser](#).

Other contributions Sessions has received include \$1000 from the [US Immigration Reform PAC](#) in 2008. The US Immigration Reform PAC advocates for lower legal immigration and is run by the wife of [John Tanton](#). According to the US Immigration Reform PAC’s website, the PAC is “the oldest continually active political committee in the nation fighting to secure our nation’s borders and secure immigration

to the traditional levels our nation can absorb.” Sessions also received \$250 from William W. Chip in 2007; Chip is the treasurer of US Immigration Reform PAC and a board member of the hate group Federation for American Immigration Reform.

The familiarity goes even deeper. In 2008, NumbersUSA awarded Sen. Sessions their Defender of the Rule of Law award for the Senator’s work in obstructing immigration reform. A year earlier, FAIR honored Sessions with their Franklin Society award for his opposition to immigration legislation in 2007. Sessions was also feted at FAIR’s board of advisors meeting and was the keynote speaker at the advisory board’s dinner. Numerous press releases from NumbersUSA and FAIR have been effusive in their praise for Sessions, applauding Sessions’ stand to “protect American workers in the Senate immigration debate” and calling him their “No. 1 champion for American workers” on immigration issues. After the McCain-Kennedy immigration reform bill was defeated in 2007, a FAIR Newsletter thanked Sessions for his leadership and wrote that “no one played a more important and more public role” in defeating the bill.

Sessions has been more than happy to return the favor. In May 2012, Sessions took to the Senate floor to enter a statement into the Congressional Record commemorating NumbersUSA’s 15th anniversary. Sessions concluded his remarks by saying, “I congratulate [NumbersUSA] on a successful first 15 years and wish them even greater success over its next 15 years.” The floor speech was a public display of affection that mirrored something Rep. Tom Tancredo (an anti-immigrant arch-nativist known for, among other things, arguing that President Obama is a greater threat than Al Qaeda) did five years earlier, when he commemorated NumberUSA’s ten-year anniversary from the House floor. With Tancredo no longer in public office, it is hardly a stretch to believe that Senator Sessions is now NumbersUSA’s very favorite member of Congress.

Sessions—along with two other Senators in the “Gang of Hate,” David Vitter of Louisiana and Chuck Grassley of Iowa—has even gotten into hot water in the past for such associations. Last year, the three Senators held a press conference to argue that President Obama’s deferred action (DACA) program was dangerous and was putting the safety of Americans at risk. An associate with FAIR was in attendance at the event, and handed out a report on the Obama Administration’s supposed history of “de facto amnesty” through executive policy decisions. The report also asked for contributions—a direct violation of federal laws that prohibit “solicit[ing] fares, alms, subscriptions, or contributions” on Capitol grounds.

Opposition to Immigration Reform

In the 112th Congressional session, NumbersUSA and FAIR lobbied on a total of 23 Senate bills, all of them having to do with immigration or social services that immigrants might be eligible for, including two bills that both groups lobbied on. Ten of those 23 bills were for comprehensive immigration reform, the DREAM Act, refugee protections, and so forth—it is safe to assume that NumbersUSA and FAIR were lobbying *against* these ten bills. The remaining 13 bills were anti-immigrant in nature: they would have implemented anti-immigrant priorities such as E-Verify, prevented the Obama Administration from exercising prosecutorial discretion for immigrants, prohibited federal funding for lawsuits aimed at striking down anti-immigrant state laws like Arizona’s SB 1070, and ended birthright citizenship. Of the 13 anti-immigrant bills NumbersUSA and FAIR lobbied on, 10 were sponsored or co-sponsored by one or more of the following four Senators: Vitter, Grassley, Cornyn, and Sessions.

Sessions sponsored 5 of the 13 anti-immigration bills: E-Verify (S1196), HALT Act (S1380), Prohibit Funds/1996 Reform Act (S169), Prohibit Funds/Lawsuits Invalidating (S1856), Child Tax Credit Integrity Act (S577).

In terms of legislation, Sessions is perhaps most obsessed with keeping immigrants—or their US-citizen children—from accessing social services. In recent months he has pressed the USDA to reveal more information about legal, non-citizen immigrants who access SNAP benefits, campaigned to end education programs for nutritional assistance, and pushed a budget amendment that would prohibit immigrants who might be legalized by this year’s immigration reform from accessing Obamacare or Medicaid.

Sessions Quotes on Immigration:

Sessions recently expressed unhappiness that immigration reform might allow immigrants to someday improve their quality of life. Speaking to reporters in April, Sessions warned that the nation’s undocumented immigrants would “be able to immediately apply for much better jobs than they currently have...Maybe they were working at a restaurant part time. Now they’re going to be truck drivers, heavy-equipment operators competing at the factories and plants and we’ve got an unemployment rate that’s very high,” he said.

Senator Sessions has been using “illegal immigrant” language to attack Thomas Perez, President Obama’s nominee for Labor Secretary. Before the President even announced Perez’s nomination, Sessions released a statement attacking him for serving as President of the Board of an organization that advocates on behalf of low-income immigrants and Latinos. The words “illegal immigrant” appear three times in Sessions’ statement, which is barely more than a paragraph long. Perez, at the Department of Justice Civil Rights Division, helped lead the Administration’s charge in striking down HB 56, the anti-immigrant law in Sessions’ home state of Alabama.

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, saying: “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: “amnesty” for child molesters. According to a June 2007 press release from Sessions’ office citing 20 loopholes in the Senate immigration bill, the 2007 immigration bill contained a “Loophole 6 – Some Child Molesters Are Still Eligible: Some aggravated felons – those who have sexually abused a minor – are eligible for amnesty.” The claim was false.

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."

More Information from the Bridge Project:

Sessions' Positions on Related Issues

Consistent Opposition to Civil Rights:

As A Senator, Sessions Has Consistently Opposed Civil Rights Efforts. According to The New Republic, "Since his election as a senator, Sessions has not done much to make amends for his past racial insensitivity. His voting record in the Senate has earned him consistent 'F's from the NAACP. He supported an ultimately unsuccessful effort to end affirmative action programs in the federal government (a measure so extreme that many conservatives were against it), he opposed hate-crimes laws, and he opposed a motion to investigate the disproportionate number of minorities in juvenile detention centers. Says Hillary Shelton, director of the NAACP's Washington bureau, '[Sessions's] voting record is disturbing. ... He has consistently opposed the bread-and-butter civil rights agenda.'" [The New Republic, 12/30/02]

Sessions Suggested NAACP And ACLU Were "Un-American." According to The New Republic, "Senate Democrats tracked down a career Justice Department employee named J. Gerald Hebert, who testified, albeit reluctantly, that in a conversation between the two men Sessions had labeled the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) 'un-American' and 'Communist-inspired.' Hebert said Sessions had claimed these groups 'forced civil rights down the throats of people.' In his confirmation hearings, Sessions sealed his own fate by saying such groups *could* be construed as 'un-American' when 'they involve themselves in promoting un-American positions' in foreign policy." [The New Republic, 12/30/02]

Sessions Allegedly "Called A White Civil Rights Lawyer A 'Disgrace To His Race.'" According to The New Republic, "Hebert testified that the young lawyer tended to 'pop off' on such topics regularly, noting that Sessions had called a white civil rights lawyer a 'disgrace to his race' for litigating voting rights cases. Sessions acknowledged making many of the statements attributed to him but claimed that most of the time he had been joking, saying he was sometimes 'loose with [his] tongue.'" [The New Republic, 12/30/02]

Sessions Called The Voting Rights Act "Intrusive Legislation." According to The New Republic, Sessions "admitted to calling the Voting Rights Act of 1965 a 'piece of intrusive legislation,' a phrase he stood behind even in his confirmation hearings." [The New Republic, 12/30/02]

Sessions Said "In Jest" That He Approved Of The KKK "Until He Found Out Some Of Them Were 'Pot Smokers.'" According to The New Republic, "Another damaging witness--a black former assistant U.S. Attorney in Alabama named Thomas Figures--testified that, during a 1981 murder investigation involving the Ku Klux Klan, Sessions was heard by several colleagues commenting that he 'used to think they [the Klan] were OK' until he found out some of them were 'pot smokers.' Sessions claimed the comment was clearly said in jest. Figures didn't see it that way. Sessions, he said, had called him 'boy' and, after

overhearing him chastise a secretary, warned him to ‘be careful what you say to white folks.’” [The New Republic, [12/30/02](#)]

In 2011, NAACP Gave Sessions an F Rating on their Civil Rights Federal Legislative Scorecard. NAACP scored votes on matters concerning prevailing wage, various judicial nominations and support for omnibus job creation legislation. [NAACP, accessed [4/25/2013](#)]

No friend of struggling Americans:

During the last few sessions of Congress, Sen. Sessions voted against the Middle Class Tax Cut Act, the Middle Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act, the Paycheck Fairness Act, Wall Street Reform, The Unemployment Compensation Extension Act, and he voted twice against the Stop the Student Loan Interest Rate Hike Act.

Sessions Introduced Two Measures Aimed At Cutting Food Stamps. According to FoxNews.com, “The Democratic-led Senate defeated 56-43 a proposal by Sen. Jeff Sessions, R-Ala., that would have restored strict asset tests for food stamp eligibility. Households with gross incomes less than 130 percent of the poverty level and liquid assets below \$2,000, or \$3,250 for households with elderly or disabled people, qualify for food stamps. But Sessions says the asset test is widely ignored by states that allow the asset limit to be exceeded if a person receives other welfare benefits. He said his amendment would have saved taxpayers \$11 billion over 10 years. A second Sessions amendment, to prevent states from getting bonuses for increasing registration of food stamp recipients, was also defeated.” [FoxNews.com, [6/19/12](#)]

Sessions Mocked Rationale For Providing Food Stamps: “Why Don’t We Just Pay For Your Clothes?” According to the Huffington Post, “But Sessions mocked the idea, arguing that it would lead only to more spending. ‘Under this reasoning, we ought to increase the food stamp program 10 times,’ Sessions said with incredulity. ‘Why not? We’re going to get more money back. Somehow it’s going to create more stimulus, and it’s going to bring in more money for the treasury and make the economy grow. Why don’t we just pay for your clothes, pay for your shoes, pay for your housing?’” [Huffington Post, [6/13/12](#)]

Sessions Suggested Opposition To Cutting Food Stamps Is Immoral. According to the Huffington Post, “He then suggested it would be immoral to follow that line of logic. ‘It’s precisely this kind of thinking that has bled our treasury of money that we need to pay for the demands that this country has. I also think it’s a moral issue,’ Sessions said. ‘Is our national goal to place as many people on welfare, food stamp support, as we can possibly put on that program? Is that our goal? Is that a moral vision for the United States of America, just to see how many people we can place in a situation where they’re dependent on the federal government for their food? I just ask that. I think we should wrestle with that question.’” [Huffington Post, [6/13/12](#)]

No Friend of Workers:

In 2012, Sen. Sessions voted against the interests of American Workers on 8 out of 9 votes scored by the AFL-CIO. [AFL-CIO, accessed [4/23/2013](#)]

Sessions Received a 12% Lifetime Rating from AFL-CIO. In 2011, Sen. Sessions voted against the interests of American Workers on 15 out of 17 votes scored by the AFL-CIO, which gave him a 12% lifetime rating that year. [AFL-CIO, accessed [4/23/2013](#)]

Since 2000, Sen. Sessions has voted at least 7 times against increasing the minimum wage.

Sessions: Minimum Wage “May Even Do Damage.” According to CNS News, “Sen. Jeff Sessions (R-Ala.) said a minimum-wage hike ‘needs to be looked at very carefully. In general, mandating price and wage factors are not good policy, in my opinion. [...] But what we need to do is create a growing economy and drive wages up -- not to \$9 an hour, but \$15, \$18, \$20 an hour. That’s the kind of thing we need to be looking at, and that comes only from economic growth, and an unwise minimum wage may even do damage.’” [CNSNews.com, [2/13/13](#)]

Sessions No Friend to Victims of Trafficking:

Sessions Twice Voted Against Reauthorizing The Violence Against Women Act. [S. 47, Vote #19, [2/12/13](#); S. 1925, Vote #87, [4/26/12](#)]

Sessions One of Five Senators to Oppose Trafficking Victims Protection Act. The (bipartisan human trafficking) amendment, authored by Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Pat Leahy (D-VT), strengthens VAWA by reauthorizing the Trafficking Victims Protection Act. The measure helps law enforcement investigate human trafficking and supports international efforts to stop the practice. Leahy noted that on the anniversary of President Lincoln’s birth, “we continue to fight human trafficking, which can amount to modern day slavery,” making the amendment a fitting tribute. “The United States remains a beacon of hope for so many who face human rights abuses. We know that young women and girls – often just 11, 12, or 13 years old – are being bought and sold. We know that workers are being held and forced into labor against their will. People in this country and millions around the world are counting on us.” The amendment was opposed by Senators Tom Coburn (R-OK), James Inhofe (R-OK), Ron Johnson (R-WI), Mike Lee (R-UT), and Jeff Sessions (R-AL). [ThinkProgress, [4/12/13](#)]

Sessions Voiced Lone Senate Objection to 2010 Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking Deterrence and Victims Support Act. Originally introduced by Sens. Ron Wyden (D-OR) and John Cornyn (R-TX) in 2009, the Senate Judiciary Committee adopted, amended, and passed the House version of this bill last summer which then passed the Senate by unanimous consent on December 9, 2010. The bill returned to the House, underwent further revision, and finally passed by voice vote on December 21, 2010. But when the Senate attempted to pass the bill again by unanimous consent, Sen. Jeff Sessions put a hold on the bill. The sole objector, Sessions effectively defeated its passage in the 111th Congress. [ThinkProgress, [1/5/11](#)]

No friend to young people:

In 1997, Sessions Voted Against The Creation Of SCHIP, The Children’s Health Insurance Program. According to a USDA fact sheet, “Created as part of the historic, bipartisan Balanced Budget Act of 1997, the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) is the largest single expansion of health insurance coverage for children in more than 30 years.” Sessions voted against the Balanced Budget Act of 1997. [USDA Fact Sheet, [2/2/01](#); H.R. 2015, Vote #209, [7/31/97](#)]

In 2007 And 2009, Sessions Voted Against Reauthorization Of Children's Health Insurance Program.
[H.R. 3963, Vote #403, [11/1/07](#); H.R. 2, Vote #31, [1/29/09](#)]

Sessions Bemoaned Undocumented Childrens' Presence in Alabama During an interview on conservative radio host Laura Ingraham's show. Alabama Sen. Jeff Sessions (R) said Hispanic children being too afraid to go to school is merely the just consequence of immigrants' unlawful decision to live in the state:

INGRAHAM: Do you think it's bad all these Hispanic kids have disappeared from the schools? Do you think that's a bad thing?

SESSIONS: All I would just say to you is that it's a sad thing that we've allowed a situation to occur for decades that large numbers of people are in the country illegal and it's going to have unpleasant, unfortunate consequences. [ThinkProgress, [8/6/11](#)]

Sessions Voted Against the DREAM Act in Both 2010 and 2007. [[10/24/2007](#), [12/18/2010](#)]

[VoteSmart link on Sessions' scorecards](#)