

Statement of Senator Larry E. Craig
Before the Senate Subcommittee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs
Hearing on: Asian Adoptions to the United States
June 8, 2006

Madam Chairman, thank you for convening this important hearing on adoptions from the Asian region – the source of the largest numbers of children adopted internationally by U.S. citizens.

I wish my schedule permitted me to stay and listen to all of your extremely knowledgeable witnesses today. I'm sure they will be providing the Subcommittee with very valuable information.

This hearing is particularly noteworthy because I believe it is the first Congressional hearing on international adoption issues to be held since publication of the final rule on accrediting agencies in intercountry adoption – one of the last steps necessary for this country to fully implement the Hague Treaty on Intercountry Adoption that was signed more than a decade ago, and ratified by the Senate six years ago.

In other words, we are fully entering a new era for international adoption by Americans – an era in which the federal government has a critical role in the adoption process. There should be an ongoing dialogue between Capitol Hill and the executive branch as we move ahead.

For example, we will surely find the need to adjust our system and law. In fact, during the immigration debate, the Senate passed the ICARE amendment offered by Senators Landrieu, DeMint, myself and others to make some important changes that will help Americans involved in international adoption. I know we still have to convince some people on the details of this amendment, and I believe we will be able to address any concerns. But my point is that there is an ongoing need for focus by Congress and our federal agencies on the issue of international adoption, and I am very pleased you are kicking off the discussion today.

As you know, I am an adoptive parent. As a freshman Senator, I became involved with the Congressional Coalition on Adoption, and several years later Senator Landrieu joined me as Senate co-chair. That Coalition today numbers nearly 200 members of the House of Representatives and the Senate – for whom adoption is a priority issue.

Senator Landrieu and I have also helped to establish a nonprofit institute called CCAI, which helps to educate members of Congress and the public about adoption. On the international front, CCAI has played a key role with foreign delegations involved in adoption issues who are traveling in our country, and organizing trips for members of Congress to visit the source countries for U.S. adoptions and discuss adoption matters with their governments.

Although I am an advocate for adoption, it wasn't my passion for this issue that drove all of these developments. It's important to note that we were responding to a demand for Congressional assistance that has been growing steadily from adopting families in the United States. When there was no specific point of contact in either Congress or the federal government handling adoption issues, our coalition and institute helped to fill in that gap.

Today, that situation is changing as regards international adoption, with the Departments of State and Homeland Security stepping into some of the Central Authority roles described under the Hague Treaty. However, one thing that probably won't change is the demand coming from adopting families.

Americans pursue international adoption for various reasons. Some have personal roots in another country that they want to renew through adoption. Others just feel a cultural kinship with a foreign country. Some adopt internationally for humanitarian reasons. And frankly, some choose international adoption as a last resort, out of frustration with U.S. law that hinders them from adopting domestically.

Whatever the motivation, U.S. families have been adopting overseas in increasing numbers – more than 20,000 annually for the last couple of years. That's a lot of people who potentially need assistance from our government in dealing with foreign countries.

The greatest number of U.S. international adoptions come from the Asian region. In particular, more Americans adopt from China than from any other country on the planet. In addition to the motivations I already mentioned, they find China's system for handling international adoption transparent, efficient, and predictable. Although there have been some ups and downs, the adoption experience of U.S. citizens in China has been largely positive.

I wish we could say as much about the experience of Americans adopting abroad elsewhere in Asia.

There are enormous differences in the "sending countries" that comprise the Asian region, including their unique cultural characteristics and governments. All of these unique traits affect how these countries deal with adoption.

Beyond those differences, obstacles have arisen to international adoption from Asia because of concerns about the horrible crime of human trafficking. In Cambodia and Vietnam, in particular, even legitimate adoptions have been disrupted in the fight against corruption.

Let me stress: I do not know of anybody in the adoption community who would countenance trafficking in children. As much as we want to facilitate adoption, those adoptions must be ethical and transparent.

Having said that, however, we should help these nations find ways to fight corruption while allowing legitimate adoptions to proceed. Otherwise, it is the orphans who will be paying the price for somebody else's criminal behavior – the orphans who cannot be adopted domestically and may be deprived of a permanent, loving adoptive family from another country.

I have only scratched the surface here, and I'm sure you will hear much, much more about the challenges and opportunities for adoption in the Asian region from the panelists before you today. In closing, let me again thank you for convening this hearing and throwing a spotlight on this issue that is so important to thousands and thousands of American families.