



OBAMA AND IMMIGRATION

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by

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In addition to creating a new sense of hope after the election of Barack Obama, there is also hope for immigration reform under the new administration. There was a huge turnout in the Latino and new American vote in the 2008 presidential election. 66% of the Latino vote went for Obama, and only 31% for McCain. In 2004, Bush got 44% of the Latino vote. Thus, in 2008, the Latino community shifted away from the Republican party. It is also clear that Latino votes contributed to Obama's wins in Florida, Colorado and New Hampshire. Moreover, at least 20 incumbents who held anti-immigration positions were voted out of power, including Elizabeth Dole and the mayor of Hazelton. An analysis of the 2008 election can be found at www.immigration08.org.

A recent report from the Immigration Policy Center (*Latino New American Voters Wield Influence in New States*, November 12, 2008), www.immigrationpolicy.org, indicates that new Americans, defined either as naturalized citizens or the US-born children of immigrants who were raised after the 1965 Immigration Act, "provided Obama with the critical, extra push he needed to win in Indiana and North Carolina, without which the victory would not have been possible, and played a significant role in winning Virginia."

Will the Obama administration direct and inspire much needed immigration reform in Congress? Presently, it is too early to determine whether this will happen, but Obama's transition team has already articulated its broad immigration principles at http://www.change.gov/agenda/immigration_agenda, although at the time of going to press, the agenda was no longer posted on this site. The immigration agenda is in favor of legalizing the millions of undocumented workers, uniting families by increasing the quotas and creating

avenues for foreign workers to fill jobs that cannot be filled by US workers.

Of course, in today's worsening economic climate, the prospect of such immigration reform still appears to remain a question mark. Clearly we cannot expect any immigration reform in the lame duck Congress during the remainder of 2008. Even in the next Congress, the new administration will have to deal with other priorities such as the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and the global financial crisis.

On the other hand, it is hoped that even if Congress does not act quickly, the era of heavy immigration enforcement fades. ICE worksite raids, although dramatic, have only torn apart families and have fortunately not been able to target the entire undocumented population in the US. These raids, combined with anti-immigrant rhetoric from politicians, have only resulted in needless bias against immigrants, which unfortunately has also fanned the flames of violence. The lynching of an Ecuadorian immigrant on the street of the Long Island village of Patchogue by seven teenagers after declaring that they were going to attack "a Mexican" goes to show the dangerous implications that result from irresponsible anti-immigrant rhetoric, be it by politicians or CNN's Lou Dobbs.

Obama's election renews hope for Americans in many ways, although from our perspective, it once again also has the potential of rendering America an attractive destination for people who want to live, study and work here the world over. After all, Obama's father also came to the US as a student for the same reason. Obama's aunt, regardless of the illegal leaking of her undocumented immigration status, shares the same predicament as millions who are unable to legalize their status because of the limited avenues under our current immigration system. She is worse off than most because she also has a deportation order against her.

It is hoped that the new administration will restore the rule of law. Much damage was done to the rule of law in the past eight years, and the indefinite detention of prisoners at Guantanamo Bay is a prime example of this erosion in addition to domestic spying and extraordinary rendition. Finally, one cannot forget the secret detention and deportation of out of status immigrants who were caught up in the rush to suspect and investigate persons of certain nationalities as alleged terrorist in the aftermath of 9/11.

Our hopes can still be betrayed under an Obama administration, but at least

we can keep our fingers crossed for now.

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