

RYAN STARK LILIENTHAL

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The Election Aftermath

By Ryan Stark Lilienthal

On November 2, 2004, the American people re-elected President Bush and expanded the Republican Party's control over the U.S. Senate and House. Arguably, President Bush's success can be attributed to, at least in part, receiving a greater percentage of Hispanic votes than prior Republican Party presidential candidates. According to some reports, 44% of Hispanic voters supported President Bush's bid for re-election. With the vote over, the question is whether the Latino's increased support for President Bush will translate into positive changes in immigration law that will benefit immigrant families and their communities?

President Bush has a golden opportunity to demonstrate his commitment to immigrant communities by advancing the immigration reforms he proposed a year ago. His proposal would permit undocumented immigrants to legalize their status, and obtain temporary, renewable work visas through employer sponsorship. President Bush also indicated that the changes would allow families to live together in the United States for the duration of the work visa.

Two major hurdles stand in the way of President Bush's proposed immigration reforms. The first is the Bush Administration's own priority to apprehend and deport immigration violators. In spite of President Bush's nice words about immigrants last January, his administration has aggressively sought to resolve America's immigration challenges through deportation rather than legalization. Consequently, more immigrant families have been torn

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apart than united. Addressing immigration challenges through legalization would be a dramatic change of course for the Bush Administration.

The second major hurdle is President Bush's own political party – the Republicans. Following President Bush's announced immigration proposals last January, members of his own political party derided the proposal's objectives and promised to fight against legalizing undocumented immigrants and expanded immigrants' rights. If President Bush is serious about immigration reform, he will have to fight hard to win the approval for such reform from his own political party.

With immigrant communities increasingly under siege over the past four years from the Bush Administration's immigration enforcement and deportation activities, it was surprising to see more Latino's voting for Bush than in the last election. Despite the unlikelihood that immigration laws will improve, perhaps President Bush will return the favor to Latino communities and surprise them with positive immigration reform.