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Immigration Policy

Our immigration system is in crisis. It is estimated that we have over 11 million undocumented immigrants in the United States, 1.7 million of who are children. Our current laws fail by not providing adequately for our national security. Also as a result of our broken system, many families are forced apart, unable to reunite with their spouses, parents, children, and siblings because of a shortage of visas. Our current system allows unscrupulous employers to skirt our laws and exploit undocumented workers in the name of cheap labor. As a consequence of our broken immigration system, there is a huge drain on our state social services, including financial strains on our local and state law enforcement. The situation leaves us with a lot of tough choices. We have a system that is broken and we have to find practical but fair solutions to fix it.

Edwards was the Democratic nominee for Vice President in 2004, and a one-term U.S. Senator from North Carolina. In December of last year, he announced his entry into the 2008 Presidential election. When asked what he thought about North Carolina residents of 100 years ago imagining if they'd have to hire an English-as-a-second-language teacher or have bilingual classes. Edwards replied

“Let me say a word about my personal experience with this issue. I grew up in a family where my father worked in a mill all of his life. And when I was young, we moved to a small town in rural North Carolina, which is where I grew up. That town is now half Hispanic. My family moved to that town because my father, who has a high school education and is still living, believed that by working hard and doing the right thing that his kids would have the opportunity for a better life. These Hispanic families? They came to Robbins, North Carolina, for exactly the same reason. And those who came and live

there, who work hard and are responsible, they have earned the right to be American citizens.”¹

To me this set the tone on his stance towards immigration reform. Edwards also believes that we should reform the immigration system so there is a clear road map to legalization and citizenship for undocumented immigrants who work hard and follow the law.² At the same time, he suggested that we work with our ally, Mexico, to better control the border and stop illegal trafficking.³ “I support policies that welcome immigrants and protect our security, including an earned legalization program for those who work hard and play by the rules. The whole notion of earned citizenship is something that I strongly support. I would expand the number of legal immigrants that can get into the country, which helps relieve some of this pressure that we have right now,” affirmed Edwards in a presidential forum in Ohio back in 2004.⁴ While his stance on immigration is clear I found no information anywhere where Edwards came up with a solution to the problems we face on immigration. I feel that as a presidential candidate he should provide some suggestions on how we came reform our policies.

Two presidential candidates I found did have possible solutions to the immigration problem. Hilary Clinton and Barack Obama. Hilary Rodham Clinton is the junior United States Senator from New York, and a member of the Democratic Party. In January of 2007, Clinton announced the formation of a presidential exploratory committee for the United States presidential election of 2008. Barack Obama is the

¹ http://www.govote.com/International/John_Edwards_Immigration.htm

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

junior United States Senator from Illinois. In February 2007, Obama announced his candidacy for the 2008 U.S. presidential election.

“I neither support illegal immigration nor the enactment of fruitless schemes that would penalize churches and hospitals for helping the truly needy. That will not fix the mess we are in. I support comprehensive immigration reform.”⁵ In order to achieve a comprehensive plan Clinton said we must consider the following; Strengthening our borders to make us safer from the threat of terrorism and using new technology to help our Border Patrol agents be more effective; greater cross-border co-operation with our neighbors, especially Mexico, to solve the problem of illegal immigration; new enforcement laws that are both strict and fair; harsh penalties for those who exploit undocumented workers; a fairer process for people seeking to come to America, especially for those whose families have been torn apart; a path to earned citizenship for those who are here, working hard, paying taxes, respecting the law, and willing to meet a high bar for becoming a citizen.⁶ Some suggestions Clinton makes for strengthening the border include developing and deploying new technology that can help our Border Patrol agents is more effective in stopping the thousands of undocumented immigrants who enter the country each day.⁷ Technology like detection sensors, unmanned drones, and infrared cameras – can assist in this important work. Clinton also proposes working to repair the rift between us and Mexico because, “we must have a willing partner in Mexico if we are going to stem the tide of illegal immigration into the United States. Mexico needs to be more fully engaged in this effort if we are going fix our immigration

⁵ <http://www.clinton.senate.gov/issues/immigration/index.cfm?topic=march72006>

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

system.”⁸ That means improving the ways in which we share intelligence and information with our neighbors.

Clinton makes a good point with saying that our immigration laws cannot begin and end with the boarder itself. Clinton opposed the Sensenbrenner Bill that wished to target and criminalize undocumented immigrants and punish those who tried to help them.⁹ “Among other things, our laws must go after unscrupulous employers who skirt our laws and exploit these workers in the pursuit of cheap labor. Our American values dictate that all people who put in a hard day’s work should receive a prevailing wage and have a safe workplace in which to work. We must honor that,” declared Clinton in a statement made on her website.¹⁰

With over eleven million illegal immigrants, our current immigration system is failing. Hilary Clinton feels that enacting stricter and more enforceable deportation laws alone can solve this problem ignores reality. Clinton recommends new laws, which are both strict and fair, are certainly part of the answer, but we also need a worker program that encourages undocumented workers to come forward and identify themselves. While I categorically oppose any program that grants unconditional amnesty for illegal immigration, I do support providing undocumented workers with the opportunity to earn legal status in this country.”¹¹ Clinton implies that although they may have come here illegally, they should be given the chance to earn legal status, after all many generations have come to the United States in the same fashion, in search of better opportunity.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

Barack Obama's father emigrated to the U.S. from Kenya.¹² Because of this he feels he understands what it means for people to come to America in search of a better life. Barack Obama mentions in a pod cast dated April 5, 2006, that "the American people are a welcoming people, they are a generous people, but they have legitimate worries about a porous border in which people are living here without documentation, and not subject to the law, living in the shadows."¹³ He also pointed out that this situation is not ideal for the illegal immigrants either because they can be exploited by employers, they may not take advantage of government services for fear of being deported, and they have no legal rights.¹⁴ Now that he has recognized the issues behind illegal immigration what does he suggest we do to fix it?

For border control Obama agrees with Clinton. So, that means "we have to have more border patrols, we have to have unmanned drones that are surveying the area. We've got to have better detention centers so that you don't essentially have a situation where you are catching people, and then immediately releasing them because there's no place to hold them."¹⁵ Obama also concurs with Clinton to holding employers responsible for taking advantage of illegal immigrants; they need to pay a serious fine and the consequences of their actions. Obama finds it to be essential to have to see a tamper proof identification card in order for them to hire workers.¹⁶ Obama references the current bill on the senate floor that basically says, "Look, you broke our laws, you've got to pay a penalty for that, you've got to pay a fine, you have to go to the back of the line,

¹² http://obama.senate.gov/podcast/060405-immigration_reform

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

you have to go through ten steps over the course of eleven years, but if you do all those things, if you show that you are committed to being a US citizen, then in fact you can stay here, work, raise your families.”¹⁷ Obama does not see this as amnesty but more so an earned pathway to citizenship.¹⁸

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

Bibliography

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http://obama.senate.gov/podcast/060405-immigration_reform

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