

2007-2008 Immigration Update 7

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Immigration Issue Has Hurt Republicans According to McCain

At a press conference on May 5, Senator John McCain said that the Republican Party's focus on immigration had cost the party support among Latino voters. Speaking on Cinco de Mayo, McCain predicted that his own approach, emphasizing enforcement followed by legalization, would draw Latino voters back to the party. Hispanic support for Republican candidates has decreased since an estimated 40+ percent of Hispanic voters supported President Bush in 2004.

Said McCain, "I believe the majority of the Hispanics share our view that the border must be secured, and the border must be secured first. But they also want us to have an attitude, which I think most Americans do, that these are God's children, and they must be taken care of, and the issue must be addressed in a humane and compassionate fashion."

Meanwhile, a spokesman for the Democratic National Committee criticized McCain's changing views on immigration. "It's hard to know what someone's real vision for our country is when they consistently take every side of the issues," charged DNC rep Luis Miranda.

CELD to Offer Summer Workshop on Immigration in the Presidential Election

On June 23-24, CELD will offer a summer workshop on Teaching Controversial Issues in Election Season: Case Studies of Immigration and Health Care. This institute will focus on successful strategies for teaching controversial issues in the context of the upcoming election. Two issues on which the candidates are likely to have different positions will serve as case studies: immigration and health care. The institute will feature presentations by CELD staff, discussion expert Diana Hess, and community resources in the fields of immigration and health care. Participants will also have the opportunity to experience two discussion models and a simulation.

This summer institute is presented by the Center for Education in Law and Democracy and supported by The Piton Foundation. Registration is limited to 30 participants. An application form is available on the CELD website or can be obtained by emailing Laurel Singleton at singleton@lawanddemocracy.org.

Schaffer v. Udall: An Interesting Division on Immigration

While Colorado senatorial candidates Bob Schaffer and Mark Udall are regarded as being on opposite ends of the ideological spectrum, their current positions on immigration belie that characterization. Republican Schaffer, who earlier in his political career belonged to Tom Tancredo's Immigration Reform Caucus, has in the past month

articulated a rather moderate position on the issue of immigration. In an interview with the Denver Post, he called for a "broad, comprehensive approach" to immigration reform and dismissed deporting the unauthorized migrants currently in the United States as a "practical impossibility." He advocated a tamper-proof ID for immigrant workers, tough enforcement of laws regarding hiring unauthorized migrants, federal grants to sheriffs and local police for immigration reform, and a pathway to citizenship for workers brought to the United States on temporary visas. Schaffer does not support any sort of amnesty for people currently in the United States unlawfully.

A shift has also taken place with Democrat Udall, who last year supported the comprehensive immigration reform bill that included provisions for a guest worker program and a path to citizenship for unauthorized migrants. Now, according to his website, Udall is supporting an enforcement-first approach similar to that being advocated by John McCain.

Post reporter Michael Riley quotes experts who "say the race for Colorado's open U.S. Senate seat shows the political difficulties of the immigration issue in 2008, especially in the West. Riley's complete article is available at http://www.denverpost.com/search/ci_8834138.

No Federal Immigration Legislation Expected Before Election Despite Effort to Bring Bill to Vote

Many Congress-watchers still believe that no significant immigration legislation will be voted on before the presidential election, despite recent efforts by Republicans to force a vote on a bill sponsored by North Carolina Democrat Heath Shuler. The bill would require employers to use the federal E-verify system (currently voluntary) to verify the status of all workers. The bill would also mandate hiring new law enforcement personnel and expanding detention facilities.

Republicans in the House of Representatives had been circulating a petition that would force Democrats to bring the matter to a vote. The petition had 186 signatures as of May 1; 218 are required to force a House vote.

The Congressional Budget Office's estimate that the bill would cost more than \$30 billion in lost tax revenues and additional spending created a roadblock to the Republicans' efforts to bring the bill to a vote. Democrats are not the only ones seeking to keep the bill from a vote; supporters of Senator John McCain's bid for the presidency believe that forcing a vote would put him in a difficult position.

Colorado Legislature Acts to Aid Farmers Seeking Workers

While most Coloradans have heard about the incident in which Representative Douglas Bruce banned from further remarks for referring to migrant farm workers as “illiterate peasants,” many may not know what bill was under consideration when he made his comment. In fact, that bill, House Bill 08-1325, went to the governor for signature on May 5.

The bill, sponsored by Republican Representative Marsha Looper and Democratic Senator Abel Tapia, establishes a pilot program in which the state would work with recruiters to expedite the process of obtaining H-2A visas for seasonal agricultural workers. The bill is designed to address the shortage of workers that farmers have complained about since tougher immigration laws and stepped-up enforcement have gone into effect. According to Representative Looper, farmers hoping to become part of the program are already calling the state.

As of May 6, it was not known whether Governor Ritter would sign the bill or not.

Border Fence Creates Unusual Alliances

The response of citizens in Brownsville, Texas, to the plan to build a fence along sections of the U.S.-Mexican border illustrate the complexity of the immigration issue. An unusual alliance of people are opposing the fence: among them are landowners who do not want their parcels of their land taken to build the fence; environmentalists, who are incensed by Security of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff’s waiving of the Endangered Species Act, the Clear Air Act and the Safe Drinking Water Act, which he deemed would interfere with building of the fence; business leaders who fear the booming ecotourism business will be damaged by the fence; officials of the Fish and Wildlife Service; farmers, who worry about their access to water; and ordinary citizens who believe that connections across the border are an essential part of the region’s culture.

Newsweek’s May 5 issue included an article on this alliance, entitled “Brownsville’s Bad Lie” (a pun based on the fact that the University of Texas Brownsville golf course will end up on the Mexican side of the fence); the article is available at <http://www.newsweek.com/id/134319?from=rss>.

A House field hearing on the fence was held in Brownsville on April 28. Lasting five hours, the hearing, which was attended by Colorado Congressman Tom Tancredo, saw heated debate on the topic. *The Brownsville Herald’s* coverage of the story can be found at http://www.brownsvilleherald.com/news/border_86233_article_pluck.html/button_hot.html

Deportation and the Growth of Gangs

The May issue of *The Atlantic* presents an interesting look at the impact of deportation on the growth of the MS-13 gang, a Latino gang called by Customs and Border Protection the “most dangerous gang” in the United States. According to the article’s author, Matthew Quirk, the gang’s growth was actually aided by the U.S. policy of criminal deportations in the 1990s. The gang originally formed in Los Angeles among the Salvadorans who were displaced by that country’s civil war in the 1980s. When the United States cracked down on criminal immigrants, many gang members were deported back to Central America. There, the author claims, the gang members were even more dependent on each other because they did not know the country where they found themselves. As deportees returned to the United States, they brought new gang members with them in a cycle Quirk calls “deportation, incubation, and return.”

The gang is a problem not only in the United States, where it has a presence in 43 states (compared to 32 in 2003 and 15 in 1996), but also in Central America, where El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala now have murder rates higher than in Colombia, the previous “murder capital” of Latin America.

Quirk argues that sentencing gang members to long prison terms for criminal offenses, rather than deporting them for immigration offenses, would be a more effective way to fight the MS-13 gang. The article is available at <http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/200805/world-in-numbers>.

Colorado College State of the Rockies Project Issues 2008 Report

The State of the Rockies project at Colorado College has issued its fifth annual report on the region. It covers “the role of immigrants, the challenge of affordable housing, the need to restore degraded landscapes, the continuing controversies over wildland protection, and the prospect of creating a long-term regional renewable energy boom.”

The report presents five key findings about immigration in the Rockies:

- The percentage of the population of the Rocky Mountain region that is foreign-born today is about 11 percent, compared to 18 percent in 1900.
- The immigration population in the region is growing more rapidly than it is nationally (27 percent compared to 16 percent from 2000-2005).
- Of the eight states in the region, six are in the highest percentage found nationally of unauthorized migrants among their foreign-born residents (40 to 54 percent).
- About two-thirds of immigrants in the Rocky Mountain region are Latino. At the same time, more than 60 percent of Latinos in the region are not immigrants. Native Latinos outnumber immigrant Latinos in every state in the region.
- Although immigrants are less likely to have health insurance than poor U.S. citizens, they do not use as many public services.

The report, also called an annual report card, is available at <http://www.coloradocollege.edu/stateoftherockies/reportcard.html>.

Summer Reading; New Collection of Stories on the Immigrant Experience

Jhumpa Lahiri, one of the most read and honored hyphenated American authors, has recently published a new collection of short stories under the title *Unaccustomed Earth*. As with Lahiri's earlier works (*Interpreter of Maladies*, *The Namesake*), the stories in this collection explore the struggle of the children of Indian immigrants to break free of their family traditions and the unsettling lives they lead when they succeed in breaking those bonds. The collection has been positively reviewed in a number of publications (see http://www.reviewsofbooks.com/unaccustomed_earth/ for a collection of reviews).