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Comprehensive immigration reform would win politically

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Written by
Bryce Ashby and
Michael J. LaRosa

President Obama's inability to pass much-needed comprehensive immigration reform could cost him the 2012 election.

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Though recent news of a rebounding economy, coupled with Republican Party infighting suggest otherwise, the Hispanic vote is neither uniform nor clearly aligned with the Democratic Party. If Hispanics fail to support the president in four key swing states — Florida, New Mexico, Nevada and Colorado — the election could go to the likely Republican candidate, former Gov. Mitt Romney.

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Time magazine kicked off the topic of Hispanic electoral power with their March 5 cover story "Yo Decido." The author noted demographic trends that favor Hispanic predominance in certain places in the nation, and last week, it was widely reported in the U.S. media that about one in six Americans are Hispanic. Additionally, one in six workers in the U.S. are Hispanic and of legal status.

While the Republicans may have learned from earlier egregious mistakes, like former candidate Herman Cain's jocular comment about electrifying the fence between the U.S. and Mexico, they seem to have a collective tin ear when it comes to Hispanic culture, issues, voting patterns and history. They don't understand the importance of Hispanics among us, and, surprisingly, they don't seem to really care.

Romney is hardly progressive or nuanced when it comes to Hispanic issues; he opposes the critically important DREAM Act, which would allow people who arrived in the U.S. as children to earn an education in America beyond high school. Common sense suggests we support a policy whereby our nation, struggling to compete in an increasingly technical, global environment, supports

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the education of young people who want to contribute to the social and economic development of the U.S.

Romney wants to talk economics, while ignoring the politically complicated issue of immigration reform, so recently he began reaching out to Hispanics by telling them that overall economic recovery is their best hope and that his policies, not President Obama's, are most likely to improve the economy.

But recently released data undermine Romney's claims. If the U.S. government passed comprehensive immigration reform (something Romney rejects), according to the American Immigration Council, a \$4.5 billion-\$5.4 billion increase in overall tax revenues would accumulate during the first three years as workers moved out of the shadows and into better-paying jobs.

Reform would generate a net growth to GDP of approximately \$1.5 trillion during the first 10 years of immigration reform's implementation (\$1.2 trillion in added consumption, \$256 billion in new investment). Thus, immigration reform may be a key component to lifting our sluggish economy.

Nevertheless, an angry, xenophobic fog has settled in over our land, leading to state-supported anti-immigration legislation that has disrupted local economies and a continuing legal challenge by the U.S. Justice Department against the state of Arizona.

Obama must continue to push for the creation of a pathway to comprehensive immigration reform and for passage of the DREAM Act. By investing political capital on this project, the president can work to ensure that his presidency lasts through 2016, while simultaneously contributing to our economic growth and solving perhaps our most pressing social dilemma: the plight of the undocumented among us.

Bryce Ashby is a Memphis-based attorney and board member at Latino Memphis. Michael J. LaRosa is associate professor of history at Rhodes College.



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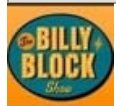
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The Rutledge, Nashville



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