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Guest Column

# Immigration Reform on Horizon

By **BRYCE W. ASHBY & MICHAEL J. LAROSA**

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November's presidential election clarified a need for bipartisan immigration reform; Republican intransigence on this issue melted away as they watched about 71 percent of Latinos vote in favor of the Democratic candidate.

Most Americans rejected the Republican immigration platform, which essentially invited the undocumented to "self-deport," and now the work begins to create meaningful immigration reform that is bipartisan, featuring a clear pathway toward citizenship for those who are here illegally.

Reform could positively affect our society and economy – in the nation at large and in our own Memphis community.

While not all undocumented immigrants are from Latin America, an estimated 54 percent were born in Mexico or Central/South America. Despite the lopsided support for President Obama by Latinos in the election and the powerfully symbolic importance of Justice Sonia Sotomayor administering the oath of office to Vice President Biden, Latino support for the president prior to the summer of 2012 was far from assured.

Obama did not prioritize immigration reform during his first term of office, and instead focused solely on border control and enforcement. In fact, Obama deported more people from the U.S. in four years than did the previous administration in eight years.

As a result of these policies, coupled with an anemic U.S. economy, for the first time in 20 years, undocumented immigration (from Mexico) to the U.S. is decreasing, according to an April study by the Pew Hispanic Trust.

In June, however, Obama instructed his Justice Department – through executive order – to support the ambitions of "Dreamers;" the dreamers are young people who were born elsewhere but have lived here and attended school in the United States; dreamers with a clean police

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## Money & Markets

spx 10:27 (EST)



20 Minute Updates

	Chg	%Chg	Value
Morningstar	26	0.7	3,803
Nasdaq	21	0.7	3,163
NYSE	54	0.6	8,938
Morningstar	38	0.7	5,814
Small Cap			

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record who plan to continue their education or serve in our military for two years, can now apply for permanent residency and citizenship.

But executive orders are temporary and only an act of Congress can make this enlightened decision of the president permanent law.

Republicans realized in November that they will never win the White House without competing in Florida, California – mega states with huge immigrant populations – and other states, including New Mexico, New Jersey and Nevada – states with significant Latino populations.

Republican representatives like Phil Gingrey of Georgia, who insist that any pathway for citizenship for the undocumented is nothing more than “amnesty” for lawbreakers, are out of step with the national mood.

“Amnesty” is a legal term that means complete forgiveness of past infractions: The forthcoming immigration reform that we hope to see would require those seeking citizenship to first pay any and all back taxes, pay a fine and admit to their guilt before consideration for citizenship.

As diverse and divergent American social and political organizations line up behind comprehensive immigration reform, including labor and business organizations and key religious organizations such as the National Catholic Bishops Conference and the Southern Baptist Convention, it is clear that immigration reform will become a legislative priority early in the second Obama administration.

The benefits of passing comprehensive immigration reform are numerous and would positively influence our political process by offering people “ownership,” in the form of potential citizenship, in U.S. society.

There are certain financial benefits to creating a comprehensive immigration reform.

First, the national treasury would receive tax revenues from people who are working on, rather than off, the books. The undocumented already pay billions in taxes each year – they pay sales tax on items they buy, they indirectly pay real estate taxes by paying rents to landowners, but a comprehensive reform would offer them the opportunity to pay taxes in a more uniform, systematic fashion.

Also, by regularizing employment of those now called “the undocumented” the social security system will be strengthened as more people pay in. Comprehensive immigration reform would help pull workers out from the shadows, allowing us to improve working conditions for all wage earners and minimize unscrupulous labor practices, as currently practiced, by companies that benefit from paying unfair, illegal wages to the undocumented.

Locally, immigration reform could help ameliorate a long-standing social problem in Memphis: a dwindling population and tax base.

With a Latino population in the Mid-South that is most likely double the official 2012 census estimate of 52,000, Memphis stands to benefit substantially from legislation that allows these residents to more fully engage in the economy and community without fear of deportation. Memphis should follow the lead of Baltimore and Dayton, Ohio, – communities that have led by welcoming immigrants through innovative city programs offering social, health and education to residents of the

RECORD TOTALS	DAY	WEEK	YEAR
PROPERTY SALES	39	260	1,625
MORTGAGES	105	532	3,061
FORECLOSURE NOTICES	0	183	661
BUILDING PERMITS	0	294	3,010
BANKRUPTCIES	47	308	1,419
BUSINESS LICENSES	19	102	479
UTILITY CONNECTIONS	0	268	1,754
MARRIAGE LICENSES	0	46	233

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## Most Read Articles

1. [Smith & Nephew Reduces Workforce](#) on Jan 31 @ 3:56P
2. [Bishop Byrne School To Close](#) by Bill Dries on Jan 25
3. [Super Bowl Ad Preview](#) on Jan 30
4. [Creative Space](#) by Sarah Baker on Jan 31
5. [Six New Seed Hatchery Teams Chosen](#) by Andy Meek on Jan 31 @ 4:59P

city. No questions asked.

A real opportunity to move forward on comprehensive immigration reform exists. Such reform is in the interest of all citizens, Democrats and Republican alike.

Supporting the undocumented in their aspiration to work, build families here and contribute to our society is good for our democracy, for our city, and it would be beneficial for the economy and would help to remind all of us of the unlimited opportunities represented by this nation.

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



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