

## Alvaro Huerta: Real immigration reform needed, not just words

By Alvaro Huerta

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PRESIDENT Obama's recent immigrant speech in El Paso, Texas, amounted to "much ado about nothing" for Latinos.

Instead of sympathetic words for immigrants in a re-election, campaign-style format, we need for Obama to make immigration reform a top priority in lieu of pandering to a growing Latino electorate.

Presidents, throughout U.S. history, employ catchy phrases to identify their administration's policy priorities. We have, for example, President Lyndon B. Johnson's "War on Poverty," President Ronald Reagan's "War on Drugs" and, how can we forget, President George W. Bush's "War on Terror."

In this tradition, we need for President Obama to wage the "War on Xenophobia" campaign as a key part of his presidency.

Just like his predecessors, Obama's "War on Xenophobia" campaign or humane immigration reform should include concrete plans of action, lobbying efforts with Congress, executive orders, legislative bills, allocated funding, Blue Ribbon Commissions and the necessary political capital investment to ensure victory.

Obama should push for a humane immigration reform policy to counter the Republican's state-by-state xenophobia strategy. In doing so, Obama needs to be consistent.

While hectoring Republicans on the plight of undocumented immigrants and asking the GOP to acknowledge those who come to this country to "earn a living and provide for their families," Obama has outpaced Bush in terms of actual deportations. This

not only includes immigrants with major and minor criminal records, including those wrongfully convicted, but also honest, hard working individuals who obey the laws, purchase goods and contribute more to the economy than they receive in return.

Where's the humanity that Obama talks about when a U.S.-born child comes home only to learn that her Mexican immigrant mother was deported? Where's the justice that Obama talks about when 11 million undocumented workers toil in low-paying jobs that most Americans reject and benefit from in the form of cheap goods and services?

While Latinos represent more than 50 million individuals of the total U.S. population, neither Obama nor the next Republican presidential candidate can afford to take this ethnic group for granted, especially since Latinos generally favor a humane immigration policy over the existing unjust and broken system. Take, for example, the DREAM Act - a bill aimed at

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helping qualified undocumented students and those who serve in the military with a pathway towards citizenship. While Obama supports this bill, he hasn't done enough to get the needed Republican votes.

If Obama truly supports Latinos in general and immigrants in particular, why didn't he invest the necessary political capital late last year in Congress before the Republicans killed the DREAM Act? Why didn't Obama play hardball with the Republicans, demanding the GOP's support for the bill, when they wanted to extend the Bush taxes for the rich?

Given that the Republicans prioritized the tax cuts for the rich over any other policy issue, including high unemployment rates and rising housing foreclosures, Obama had the perfect opportunity to get this bill passed. Instead, it died in Congress, like the dreams of countless immigrant students and those serving in the military.

If Obama isn't willing to risk his political capital, especially now with favorable poll numbers after the killing of Osama bin Laden, what makes the more than 50 million Latinos in this country think that Obama will pass a humane immigration reform bill anytime soon?

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