

LA VOZ

2010: year to push for immigration reform -- Before the November elections

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HOUSTON - Political pressure in 2010: that is the goal that brought together the forces involved to get an immigration reform bill in the second year of President Barack Obama.

Since the union of religious leaders to lobby for reform at the national level, through two projects that could be discussed in Congress this spring, until the influence it has the crucial Hispanic vote in the November congressional elections, this year could be decisive for a change in immigration laws.

In Houston, Cardinal Daniel DiNardo recently led a meeting that brought together representatives of various religious denominations to announce a joint national strategy for reform.

"Immigration and what we do about a human rights issue. These are recognized, not donated by an institution or government," he said at that meeting DiNardo.

Community organization convened by The Metropolitan Organization (TMO), some 300 leaders and clerics were committed to two things: educate their congregations on local immigration and lobbying among legislators.

"Habemos many are going to find resistance from people who are influenced by the myths and the media and we will try to change that, clarifying. Furthermore, we do as any citizen in this country use our democratic rights to express to our congressmen our desire for reform," says the priest Manuel La Rosa, of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston.

Nationally, the Immigration Reform Campaign For America, which brings together 700 religious groups, community, union and business in recent days held 100 events, including forums, rallies and marches in 28 states.

This revival of the civic movement for reform, which pledged to support Obama in 2008 during his campaign, has resumed vigor after a series of positive signs in the political arena.

Even a year after Obama has yet to fulfill its commitment, maintains, secures the White House spokesman Luis Miranda.

"We are urging the Senate sponsors to submit the bill when there is an opening in the calendar," explains Miranda email, referring to the tight legislative agenda facing Congress as well as Obama himself, interspersed with questions as crucial as health system reform, reform of the financial system, encouraging job creation and others.

This situation was compounded this week when the Democrats lost the seat in the Senate left the late Edward Kennedy, of Massachusetts. In doing so, lost control of Congress guaranteed them that their bills were safe Republican lock.

But Miranda emphasizes, "for the purpose of advancing the legislative process ... (for reform), the President designated the Secretary of Homeland Security, Janet Napolitano, to work with stakeholders and leaders in the House and Senate. That process had included talks with Senators (Charles) Schumer (D) and (Lindsey) Graham (R), who are working to formulate a project of law. "

It is precisely two bills, one already presented in the House of Representatives and the other referenced Miranda, who kept growing hope that the reform to take shape this year.

Two projects

Illinois Rep. Luis Gutierrez and members of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus in December presented a reform bill before the House that eventually would have to be merged with the bipartisan bill by Sens. Schumer and Graham.

Now, says Maria Jimenez, a local leader to grow, "we have to give a major boost to have an initiative in the Senate, both chambers passed their versions to achieve something other than concrete in late June, before the concern representing political November congressional elections.

But Clarissa Martinez, director of Immigration and Campaign of the National Council of La Raza (NCLR by its initials in English), warns: "There are a small minority opposed to giving progress on this issue. Although being a minority have had enough voice and that has created anxiety to members of Congress. "

Therefore, another factor influencing the possibility of reform is that Latinos have learned lessons, says Martinez.

In 2006-2007, remembers when there was a previous attempt in Congress to pass a reform, Latinos showed their strength with mass rallies. In 2007 and 2008 did so massively as to become naturalized citizens and vote.

"In 2007 the lesson we learned is that anti-immigrant groups were focused to contact their members of Congress ... Now we must focus on Congress, the White House. We know what it is to ignore the calls, visits, letters," said Martinez.

Although the draft was much celebrated Gutierrez, several experts believe that its role has been primarily to the opening of the debate, but it will be the Senate that calls the shots.

The Speaker of the House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi, "does not want its members from making that big leap and vote for the initiative is not going to happen in the Senate because these representatives will then be beaten in their election campaigns in their districts by they voted for an 'amnesty' without any sense," says Houston attorney Charles Foster, chairman of the Immigration Task Force of the Greater Houston Partnership business chamber.

The baton, he says, would Schumer, who chairs the Senate Subcommittee on Immigration, which experts say could present their project in February possibly together with Senator Graham. "Graham has said he is willing to work on a bipartisan bill," said Foster, co-chair of the immigration law firm of Foster Quan.

But with his introduction, "we send a clear message that now is the time to address reform," he says via email by the New Jersey Democratic Rep. Nydia Velazquez, president of the Hispanic Caucus.

Muzaffar Chishti, director of research center office Migration Policy Institute, School of Law at New York University, believes the Senate bill would have two major differences with Gutierrez.

"The draft Gutierrez lacks a mechanism for future immigration flows," said by telephone. "The business community wants a large temporary worker program."

"The second difference is probably how generous will be the mechanism for legalization. The Gutierrez him too," he says. The project would allow the majority representative of the undocumented in the country for December 15, 2009 who have not committed serious crimes immediately requested "conditional residence" without leaving the U.S., only paying a fine of 500 dollars and proving they work.

Another problem, perhaps more, is the economic recession that has left millions of Americans unemployed.

"At a time when Americans do not feel very optimistic about his situation is very difficult to display pro-immigrant," says Chishti.

This explains Foster, could lead to many Democrats who won seats in 2008 narrowly traditionally Republican to want to leave an issue as controversial as immigration comes November.

But "the recession is a concern for all. Also the Latino community is suffering for it. But in reality there is never a perfect time for immigration reform. The time is now," says Ali Noorani, executive director of the National Immigration Forum.

"We are better organized, have more power ... More power for the Latino vote in 2008 gave 44 electoral votes to the president. Without the support of the immigrant community, the president will be reelected (in 2012), "says Noorani, adding that Latinos may abstain as punishment.

"Latinos will respond to a candidate who responds to the community without seeing whether a Democrat or Republican," said Martinez of the NCLR, "It is important that the Republican Party no longer make immigration a scapegoat if he wants to regain its support . And if the Democrats are interested in making solid support from the Latino community will have to respond. "