

Ted Cruz's Path From George W. Bush Adviser to Immigration Reform Opponent

Republican critics scoff at Cruz's opposition to a pathway to citizenship.

by [Beth Reinhard](#)

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In 2000, Ted Cruz was known as a Texas-raised, Harvard-trained domestic policy adviser to the George W. Bush campaign. Bush was a two-term governor from a border state who was determined to fix what he saw as a broken, inhumane immigration system.

Cruz helped craft the campaign's immigration policy, which called for speeding up the application process, increasing the number of work visas, and allowing the relatives of permanent residents to visit the U.S. while their applicants were pending. "Family values don't stop at the Rio Grande," Bush used to say.

Bush, a self-described "compassionate conservative," went on to win the presidency and champion a law that would have allowed millions of illegal immigrants to earn citizenship. Cruz went on to win election to the Senate from Texas as a hero of the tea party movement and emerge as a sharp critic of a pathway to citizenship in the latest attempt at immigration reform on Capitol Hill.

The route Cruz chose, from working on the reform-minded Bush campaign to voting against the bill Wednesday as a member of the Senate Judiciary Committee, confounds some of those who crossed paths with him. His role on the Bush campaign is a lesser-known part of the biography of a politician increasingly viewed as a potential presidential contender in 2016.

"I'm disappointed in Ted because he's a very bright, articulate lawyer with a substantial base of knowledge about immigration," said Houston lawyer Charles Foster, who advised the Bush campaign on immigration and said he worked closely with Cruz. "But instead of using that knowledge, he's acting like a typical politician and just talking about the border being out of control."

It would be unfair to accuse Cruz of flip-flopping, however, since Bush said little during the campaign about citizenship except to state his opposition to "blanket amnesty." Cruz saw his job as a Bush campaign staffer "to develop the best possible argument for the priorities that then-Gov. Bush articulated," said Cruz's senior political adviser, Jason Johnson. He said that he and Cruz did not discuss Bush's later support for a pathway to citizenship, but he insisted that the senator has never favored creating that process for illegal immigrants.

"His position on immigration and border security has been consistent and clear, and that is that we should control the border and reform the legal-immigration system," Johnson said.

The current bill would allow illegal immigrants to seek citizenship after passing a background check, paying taxes and fines, holding down a job, and going to the back of the line. Before the vote on Tuesday, Cruz said that allowing undocumented workers to earn citizenship would be unfair to legal immigrants and encourage more illegal immigration. He also called the bill "toothless" to enforce border security. His amendments,

which failed, would have tripled the number of border-patrol agents and barred illegal immigrants from earning citizenship.

“We’re a nation of immigrants,” he said. “Every one of us around this table are the children of those who came here seeking freedom, and we’re also a nation of rule of law. In addressing immigration, I believe we need to respect both legacies.”

As the Republican nominee for president in 2000, Bush’s chief immigration proposal was to split what was then the Immigration and Naturalization Service into two agencies, one to serve immigrants and the other to enforce border security. Bush also called for spending \$500 million so that all immigration applications could be processed within six months, increasing the number of work visas, and allowing the relatives of permanent residents to visit the U.S. while their applicants were pending.

“Frankly, I think it laid the foundation for our colleagues in Congress today,” said John Bridgeland, who supervised Cruz’s work on the campaign’s immigration plan as deputy policy adviser. “We thought it was sensible, represented an adherence to law, and recognized the economic and other contributions that immigrants make.”

Bush and Cruz represent opposite sides of the divide among Texas Republicans on immigration reform, torn between pragmatism toward a growing Hispanic population and distrust of the federal government to enforce its borders. Gov. Rick Perry faced withering criticism from his rivals for the 2012 presidential nomination for signing a law that granted college tuition breaks to the children of illegal immigrants. Before she retired earlier this year, Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison cosponsored a bill that would have allowed children who were brought to this country illegally to receive legal status. On the other hand, Rep. Lamar Smith has been an outspoken critic of legalization, while Sen. John Cornyn, who sits on the Judiciary Committee with Cruz, joined him in voting against the bill on Wednesday.

“There’s been a jumble of reactions to immigration reform since Ronald Reagan granted amnesty in the 1980s. It’s a difficult issue for Republican conservatives,” said Daron Shaw, a University of Texas government professor who worked on the Bush campaign in 2000. “Ted is a law-and-order guy. I think Bush approached immigration more as a businessman.”

Cruz’s position also puts him at odds with the other prominent Cuban-American Republican in the Senate, Marco Rubio of Florida, who is leading the charge for the immigration-reform bill. Both are considered possible presidential contenders in 2016.

“I’m disappointed in Ted Cruz because he is capable of being a leader on the immigration issue like Rubio,” said Artemio Muniz, the chairman of the Federation of Hispanic Republicans, an offshoot of the Republican Party of Texas. “He has the conservative pedigree to take the lead and be the guy and close the gap between the Hispanic community and Republicans, but he has chosen another route.”

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