

Former White House official encourages moderation in immigration reform

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Mickey Ibarra answers a question from U student Victor Rodriguez during a Hinckley Forum on immigration reform Tuesday. Ibarra said America should be building bridges to unite its neighbors rather than building walls to divide them.

Immigration reform should focus on building bridges to unite our neighbors, not walls to divide us, said former White House Director of Intergovernmental Affairs Mickey Ibarra.

Ibarra, who holds a master's degree in education from the U, returned to campus Tuesday for a Hinckley Forum, during which he praised a bill currently before the U.S. Senate and lambasted its counterpart, House Bill 4437, which would make undocumented citizens felons.

"We need to end the culture of illegality by tightening the borders but allowing for a worker program," Ibarra said. "The House bill does the opposite by calling for the deportation of even tax-paying families."

Despite support from the Bush administration, the House bill has met strong opposition from Hispanic organizations and the Catholic Church.

Meanwhile, the Senate bill received bipartisan support in the Senate Judiciary Committee in a 12-6 vote-a move that Ibarra said deserves at least the same level of applause as the

criticism lawmakers are used to taking. Ibarra namely praised Republicans Arlen Specter, Lindsey Graham, Sam Brownback and Mike DeWine for the courage they showed in their votes.

However, Ibarra said the Senate bill is still threatened by Bill Frist, who insists on the House version of reform, and Orrin Hatch, who has been supported by many Hispanic organizations in the past but was nowhere to be found Monday, voting no by proxy.

"(Hatch) opposes amnesty. He thinks that's what the bill would do," Ibarra said.

Ibarra said he does not support amnesty and clarified that there is a difference between "earned legalization" and amnesty. He said illegal immigrants should have to register, have a background check, pay taxes, pay a fine for breaking the law and apply for residency-and then remain inside the country to work while their application is processed.

He added that any final reform should accomplish three goals: improve border security, address economic interests and reflect our national values.

Ibarra criticized the federal government for polarizing the public by playing on fears of terrorism and said they failed to respond to illegal immigration earlier.

"A lack of policy has left states to deal with this challenge on their own," Ibarra said. "Just as they failed to respond to Hurricane Katrina, the government is leaving state elected-officials abandoned and overwhelmed...I'm glad I'm not in the White House now because I'm not sure even I could spin this into a positive."

Unlike the federal government, it's been difficult for Ibarra to put the immigration issue on the backburner-because he is the product of past immigration legislation.

Ibarra's father Francisco came to the United States at the age of 15 from Oaxaca, Mexico on "bracero"-a worker visa program, during World War II. Francisco was sent to Spanish Fork to perform agricultural work before moving to Kennecott Copper Mine, joining the military, attending beauty school and eventually opening his own business, the Mona Lisa House of Beauty.

Mickey Ibarra said his father-on his only visit to the White House-met President Bill Clinton and found himself speechless, overcome with emotion. Clinton responded, "sir, your son is doing great work for us."

Through the rest of the visit to D.C., each of Francisco's conversations began the same way-"the president called me sir."

"With good education, hard work and belief, you can succeed in America...This is the land of opportunity, and we must protect it," Mickey Ibarra said. "We must rid the illegality of a program that brings people to the American dream."

Ibarra added that he was happy to see the resurgence of grassroots activism with 500,000 protestors marching in Los Angeles, 100,000 in Phoenix and local walkout protests featuring students from West High and Kearns High schools.

"I think the Senate is starting to listen," he said. "The Latino vote is continuing to grow in significance and value. They're watching."

Ibarra said, while there is a level of racism that no one likes to talk about, he is encouraged by the overall picture of reform.

"There is a big hill to climb, but I'm more encouraged today than ever before," he said.

Kevin Brown, a sophomore in electrical engineering, said he was encouraged by Ibarra's ideas.

"I like the idea that Mexicans can come work here, and with help become citizens rather than being hardliners about this," Brown said.

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