



STATEMENT
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NOW WHAT?

Washington – Barack Obama has been reelected president with overwhelming support from Latinos, the nation's fastest growing voting bloc. ImmigrationWorks USA president Tamar Jacoby made the following statement.

Barack Obama was reelected yesterday despite losing the white vote by 20 points, while Latinos opted for the president by a margin of 71 to 27 percent.

No wonder when Obama laid out his agenda last night, immigration was near the top of his list.

The question is what has changed in Washington – or what can the president do to change the dynamic – to make immigration reform more achievable now than it has been over the last four stalemated years?

The dynamic blocking progress on immigration was more than simple gridlock. Both parties played into it, and both felt they benefited. Democrats owned the issue and used it to hammer Republicans – not, in far too many cases, in order to pass a bill, but rather to show voters how recalcitrant Republicans were and how unsympathetic to minorities. Meanwhile, Republicans ignored the issue, as if it would simply go away, or stood in the corner with their arms folded across their chests: on immigration at least, the party of NO.

The good news: that dynamic has begun to change recently, or seemed to. Over the past year or so, Republicans in both chambers have been floating immigration proposals. They covered a broad range of issues, from Florida Sen. Marco Rubio's version of the DREAM Act for young people brought to the U.S. illegally as children to some half dozen House measures to fix the legal immigration system by streamlining unworkable programs, adding visas, reducing wait times and more.

The all-important question now: can the president take advantage of and build on this new dynamic rather than reverting to the old pattern – the seemingly righteous but unproductive partisan blame game?

A better dynamic too will take both sides. It would have to start quietly behind the scenes, far from the limelight. Both parties would need to own reform. Republicans would have to stretch in what they're prepared to support. But Democrats too would have to compromise – any bipartisan legislation will fall far short of their wish list. An all-inclusive package like the McCain-Kennedy bill of 2006 seems unlikely. But that doesn't mean there can't be real breakthroughs – and real relief for everyone, immigrants and the businesses that count on them, who desperately need a better immigration system.

Is Washington capable of this? Can the partisans let go? It's hard to imagine today with the bitterness and polarization of the campaign still hanging in the air.

But surely the message of yesterday is that voters on both sides want results. All eyes are back on Washington. You won – now what?

IW USA president Tamar Jacoby can be reached for comment at 202 506-4541.

ImmigrationWorks USA is a national federation of employers working to advance better immigration law. Our network links major corporations, trade associations and state-based coalitions of small to medium-sized business owners concerned that the broken immigration system is holding back the nation's economic growth. Their shared aim: legislation that brings America's annual legal intake of foreign workers more realistically into line with the country's labor needs.