

IMMIG REFORM PRESSURE ON OBAMA, DEMS

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Body

President **Obama** talks a good game when it comes to immigration **reform**. But by now, it is obvious that's all he does, and few take his promises seriously.

The point was driven home in Jackson Heights, Queens, last Saturday during a breakfast gathering of assorted politicians and community activists concerned with the immigrant rights issue.

Rep. Luis Gutiérrez (D-Ill.), who heads the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Immigration Task Force, told the group that if you tell people you are going to push for **reform**, they laugh at you.

"No one believes anymore that immigration **reform** is possible, at least not in the next couple of years," Gutiérrez told the group at Natives, a Colombian eatery on Northern Blvd. The busy, spacious restaurant has become an informal meeting place for Queens politicians, activists and artists.

"This administration has failed us. We want **Obama** to succeed, but his policies have been detrimental to immigrants," he said.

"No se puede tapar el sol con la mano [The sun cannot be covered with one hand]," Gutiérrez added with his trademark intensity.

Covering the sun became even more difficult after Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano's abject performance before a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing last Wednesday.

When anti-immigration **reform** pol Sen. Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa) questioned her about deportation practices - in particular about the supposed "threat" of using prosecutorial discretion to allow some individuals with compelling cases to delay their deportations - the secretary went out of her way to show him she too was a good practitioner of toughness for the sake of toughness.

Napolitano breathlessly rolled out the department's record number of deportations under her watch, and emphasized that the **Obama** administration granted deferred action in less than 900 cases last year. That was fewer than the Bush administration, she meekly told Grassley.

"It's a sad day when the **Obama** administration uses deportation statistics from the Bush years as a measure of success," said Frank Sharpy, executive director of the immigrant advocacy group America's Voice.

Sad and shameful.

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There are 1,200 deportations every day, and 4 million American children whose parents are undocumented, Gutiérrez told the gathering at Natives.

"There has to be a better way. Make no mistake, the President has executive authority and the power to change things, but his immigration policy is one of supporting e-verify, 287(G), Secure Communities, deportations. It is ripping our community asunder, and we must stand up to it," he said to a standing ovation.

"U.S. policies should be pro-immigration, not against it; we need coordination, to leave divisions behind and speak with one voice," Gutiérrez told the energized audience. "We have to challenge Republicans but also Democrats."

In fact, I would add, we can forget Republicans who care only about persecuting and dehumanizing immigrants.

But let's talk about Democrats: Even though immigrants need Obama and Democratic Congress members on their side, the President and those Congress members also need the increasingly critical immigrant vote, especially Latinos. And there is a growing feeling among Hispanics that there has got to be a quid pro quo next time around so no politician will get something for nothing.

"They need to be reminded the road to the White House goes through el barrio," Gutiérrez said to wild applause.

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