

VOTERS SPOKE PRO-REFORM ON ELECTION DAY

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Body

WE WARNED THEM months ago, but they refused to listen. And on Nov. 4, the historic day Barack Obama was elected President of the United States, it happened: Voters sent them back to wherever they came from.

Yes, immigrant voters - the majority of them Latinos - not only delivered key battleground states to Obama and guaranteed the election of many members of the House and the Senate, but defeated quite a few rabidly anti-immigrant legislators.

We had told them in this space that the majority of Americans do not support an enforcement-only policy and that immigrant citizens would vote them out of office. But they didn't believe it.

"Voting for Obama was a great feeling and to know that immigrants have shown their strength in this election was even better," said Jaime García, an Ecuadoran immigrant who has been a U.S. citizen for 10 years.

For García, a Woodside, Queens, resident and first-time voter, the war and the economy were the main reasons he chose Obama over John McCain. But immigration also was an important motivating factor.

"The way immigrants are treated is unfair," he said. "I wanted to vote for a President who would change that."

He wasn't the only one.

A report by America's Voice, a Washington pro-immigration group, shows that naturalized voters, many of them exercising that right for the first time, defeated quite a few anti-immigrant crusaders.

A few of them like Marilyn Musgrave (R-Colo.), whom the KKK had once endorsed, and Thelma Drake (R-Va.) lost their congressional seats. While Lou Barletta, the former mayor of Hazleton, Pa., famous for persecuting immigrants, was rejected in his bid for Congress.

We warned them months ago that voters did not agree with their extreme positions, but they could not bring themselves to believe it.

At the same time, voters supported candidates with common-sense approaches to fixing the immigration system. We are talking about people like Dina Titus (D-Nev.), elected to the House; Bill Foster (D-Ill.), who was reelected; Democrat Jim Himes also elected in Connecticut, and Rep. Gabrielle Giffords (D-Ariz.), who was given another term by the voters.

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In the Senate, new **pro-reform** senators include former Virginia Gov. Mark Warner; Jeanne Shaheen (D-N.H.); Mark Udall (D-Colo.); Kay Hagan (D-N.C.), who defeated Elizabeth Dole, and Tom Udall (D-N.M.).

At a national level, the National Council of la Raza helped more than 1.5 million immigrants to become citizens and registered more than 186,000 Hispanic **voters**.

In New York the fact that it was never a contested state didn't lessen the enthusiasm of minority and immigrant **voters** who went to the polls in record numbers.

In the city, 715,000 new **voters** have registered since the beginning of the year - 200,000 of them in the past two weeks. Many are African-Americans or Latinos.

The New York Immigration Coalition and its executive director, Chung-Wha Hong, sent a heartfelt message to the President-elect on Wednesday congratulating him on his momentous triumph. But they also reminded Obama that the immigration crisis is still unresolved.

"The need for just and humane immigration **reform** remains as urgent as ever," the message said. "We look forward to working with an Obama administration and a new Congress to craft a sensible new immigration policy - one that acknowledges immigrants' hard work and contributions to our nation, honors devotion to family, and strengthens our nation."

The kind of fair and rational immigration policy that new **voters** like Jaime García would support at the ballot box. aruiz@nydailynews.com

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