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THE IMPORTANCE OF THE OBAMA VICTORY FOR IMMIGRANTS

The re-election victory of President Barack Obama in November's election, owing in large part to the Latino vote, is a very important development for the immigrant community.

One tangible result will be the continuation of the important Deferred Action for Child Applicants (DACA) program through which over 1 million young undocumented immigrants will receive temporary legal status. The President's election opponent, Mitt Romney, would have likely closed this program down. As such, the election results provide welcome relief to those who have already applied for DACA, and remove any reason to wait longer for hundreds of thousands of young people qualified for the program who have been sitting back, waiting to see who won.

It's safe to say that these DREAMers can take comfort that they will not be subjected to deportation by applying, as long as Obama is in office. Most importantly, they will now have permission to work legally here, the right to a driver's license, possibly financial aid for college, and generally speaking, a future -- for the first time in their lives.

This represents about 1 million lives changed by this vote.

Moreover, the election could create new momentum for passage of comprehensive immigration reform. Unlike 2008, immigration reform appears to be high on the agenda of priorities for a second Obama term. He has already stated it's one of his highest priorities, as have Democratic leaders in Congress. Democrats also gained seats in both houses of Congress as well, and this will translate into more votes for immigrants.

And many in the Republican Party are rethinking their prior opposition to immigration reform. Their candidate Romney received less than 30% of the votes of the Latino community, and lost critical swing states like Colorado, Nevada, Florida and Virginia due to their large Latino voting blocs. It's safe to say the Latino vote also contributed to the loss of several Senate seats by the Republicans. Many Republican leaders are now calling for their Party to change their position on reform in order to give them some hope of getting more Latino votes in future elections.

As a result, I would say that, for the first time in over 5 years, there is a realistic possibility that comprehensive immigration reform could pass the Congress in the next 12 months.

If it is to pass, an immigration reform bill must be pursued early in Obama's next term. There will still be strong opposition to any legalization of undocumented immigrants among large elements of the American public. If it is not pushed through Congress in 2013, it will be harder to get approved in 2014, which is another election year.

The immigrant community and its advocates should seize the moment and lobby the Obama Administration and Congress to pass reform early next year. It would be the most appropriate and most lasting step that Obama and Congress can take for immigrants, and it would open the door to millions more Latino citizens in the years to come.

Most of all, it would singlehandedly change for the better the lives of many millions of our community members.

After the vital support that the Latino community and the immigrant community provided to put him over the top in this election, President Obama and his team owe immigrants a large debt. He's already acknowledged that in his first press conference following his election.

Now, as he embarks on his new term and ponders the challenge of passing immigration reform, let's hope that the President remembers the great words of Cesar Chavez he borrowed for his election campaign: "Si, se puede!"