

# Immigration 2015

Republicans, it's time to govern, not obstruct | BY R. MARK FREY

Last year was eventful, with the biggest immigration-related story involving President Obama's November post-election executive actions to address some of the more troubling aspects of our current immigration system.



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To be sure, the opposition has been livid and voluble about the President's recent initiatives. His executive action has been referred to as an outrageous encroachment upon Congressional authority.

Inskeep, President Obama questioned the Republican Party's resolve to tackle immigration reform since it now appears to be "captive to nativist elements of the party."

Noting that it is unlikely that he can work with those who view immigration as "fundamentally bad to the country," such as Rep. Steve King (R-Iowa), the President expressed hope that some in the Republican Party will be compelled to do something, since there are many who feel immigration is good for the country. If not, "then probably we're not going to get much more progress done and it'll be a major debate in the next presidential election," the President remarked. King, incidentally, is well-known for his observation that for every young undocumented immigrant in the U.S., there are 100 more with "calves the size of cantaloupes," a result of moving drugs across the desert to the U.S.

What happened within the Republican Party to cause this degree of resistance to immigration and immigrants? How did the party of Lincoln become so hostile to people of color? Why does the Republican Party resist working across the aisle to get the people's business done in this area?

As journalist Bill Moyers observed in 2014, the Republican Party for many years, for well into the 20th century in fact, was the party known for supporting the advancement of civil rights. He noted that the Republican Party declared in its 1960 party platform that racial discrimination has no place in the U.S. The platform specified that racial discrimination:

*can hardly be reconciled with a Constitution that guarantees equal protection under law to all persons. In a deeper sense, too, it is immoral and unjust. As to those matters within reach of political action and leadership, we pledge ourselves unreservedly to its eradication.*

Likewise, Republican leadership was critical in the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 with 61 percent of Democrats and 80 percent of Republicans supporting the legislation in the House of Representatives, and roughly 66 percent of Democrats and 82 percent of Republicans supporting it in the Senate.

These questions about the recent history of the Republican Party come to mind in light of the recent news of former Senator Edward Brooke's death. A Republican and U.S. senator representing Massachusetts from 1967 to 1979,

Brooke was the first African American popularly elected to the U.S. Senate.

He was adept at building coalitions with those from both sides of the aisle while at the same time garnering much respect for his leadership skills and prowess as a politician. Not a Democrat but a Republican, Brooke was a staunch advocate for civil rights, fair housing, and desegregation of public schools while challenging his Republican colleagues to work more strenuously on matters involving problems facing our cities and the poor.

For the first time in almost a decade, the Republican Party has an opportunity to jettison its obstructionist ways and govern in a manner reflecting wisdom and maturity. It has an opportunity to do the people's business and serve the best interests of the nation.

Immigration reform must be on its agenda. It has been ignored for far too long. Immigration reform is a civil rights issue deserving of the Republican Party's attention. And, why not? This party knows a thing or two about civil rights as the party of Lincoln and other champions of the people. To ignore this fact is to ignore its history, and debase it as well. ●

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Tired and frustrated with the House's continued failure to act, President Obama finally moved forward with initiatives allowing certain undocumented immigrants to temporarily stay in the U.S., provided they meet certain criteria (specifically, being parents of U.S. citizens or permanent residents and in the U.S. since at least January 1, 2010); enhancing border security; prioritizing the deportation of felons (excluding state/local status-related offenses), suspected terrorists, those apprehended at the border, and gang members; and modernizing the U.S. immigrant visa system, among others.

And, here we are—in a new year, with a new Congress, and a lingering hope that President Obama's executive actions will spur immigration reform, rather than to only increase the outcries that Obama is acting more like a king than a president, and that it needs to be reined in through litigation or even impeachment. Sadly, many fear the Republican-controlled Congress will not be up to the task, and that it will be more inclined to obstruct rather than govern.

Just a few weeks ago, in a late December interview with *National Public Radio's* Steve



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