

Stop the Raids (with Peter Siavelis)

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President Barack Obama is quickly fulfilling his promise for change, with dramatic departures from President Bush's policies. During his first week in office he issued an executive order halting military trials at Guantanamo Bay and pledging to close the facility within a year. Obama explicitly banned the use of torture for prisoners held there, ordering officials to abide by the established army field manual when undertaking interrogations. He overturned President Bush's policy on funding for international family planning, and very publicly announced that diplomacy would be the new emphasis for US foreign policy. Obama outlined a whole series of changes to ethic rules, and reiterated his commitment to end the war in Iraq. And this was only week one.

The second week brought a cascade of additional radical departures from Bush policies. Congress passed, and Obama pledged to sign, the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) and which will provide health insurance coverage to 7 million children from low- and middle-income families. Bush vetoed an almost identical bill. Obama also reversed a Bush administration policy that banned states from establishing tougher emission standards than the federal government, signed an equal pay bill previously blocked by Bush, and issued executive orders to undo many of the Bush Administration policies that stacked the deck in favor of employers over workers.

All of these measures are part of the deeper aspiration of the Obama presidency: to restore fairness, faith, trust and decency in government in image and in practice. Obama took on this task in his inaugural address, saying, “On this day, we gather because we have chosen hope over fear, unity of purpose over conflict and discord.... The time has come to reaffirm our enduring spirit; to choose our better history; to carry forward that precious gift, that noble idea, passed on from generation to generation: the God-given promise that all are equal, all are free, and all deserve a chance to pursue their full measure of happiness.”

What has been missing from this litany of progress is action on immigration. At the core of the Obama initiatives has been the idea that this Administration will do what is right even when it is difficult or unpopular. Most people acknowledge and understand that comprehensive immigration reform during the first months of the Obama administration is unlikely given the overwhelming crises the president faces in the areas of the economy, unemployment, financial markets and foreign policy. However, there is something the president can do to make immigration policy more consonant with the core values of elaborated the new Administration: stop the arbitrary and hostile raids on the homes, workplaces and schools of undocumented Latino workers. These raids create a culture of fear, when economic anxiety is already plaguing Latino families. These raids stoke the hatred and racism that economic anxiety among the majority population often creates. These raids are unnecessary and impractical, leaving hardworking and employed individuals in dire economic situations and curtailing economic activity at a time of deepening economic crisis. Most importantly, these raids do not represent “our better history” and the “God-given promise that all are equal and free.”

As clear evidence emerges of a slowdown in the numbers of unauthorized workers now in the United States, and in the wake of the Bush administration's late-hour deplorable decision to deny immigrants a constitutional right to a lawyer at their deportation hearings, Que Pasa urges the Obama administration to issue an executive order to immediately end these raids in its continued effort to overturn another of the legacies of the Bush Administration that is at odds with our core values of the nation.