

Hope for an Immigration Solution: Donald Trump's Vision of a Unified America

Today identity politics and racial divides threaten the unity of these United States. Politicians spout rhetoric advocating one division of society over another for the dominance of one societal argument over another. No statesman except Donald Trump is speaking to the vision of a unified America. He's providing the leadership people deserve based on love and respect.

Meanwhile there is hope coming from the Hispanic evangelical community for a solution to the immigration problem. While Washington seems deadlocked, the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference (NHCLC), founded by Sam Rodriguez, has connections so strong on both sides of the political aisle that David Brody of the Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN) called the group the "evangelical whisperer."

Working Together

The group has managed to form close friendships with both the Trump White House and Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, who called the NHCLC when she read that millions of illegal immigrants would be deported.

"She figured her voice on this sensitive topic wouldn't move the needle with this White House," Brody wrote, "so she turned to, at least on the surface, what may seem an unlikely choice: the conservative evangelical community, specifically her friends (that's right, friends) at the [NHCLC]." Brody's report continued:

A source with knowledge of the immigration discussions between House leadership and the Hispanic evangelical

community tells CBN News that the Pelosi phone call was to top leaders at the NHCLC with a desperate plea to have them convince the White House to pull back on the impending raids, which at the time was reported to involve millions of deportations. The NHCLC did indeed pick up the phone and dial 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. A source close to the White House acknowledges that the NHCLC discussed the impending raids with administration officials, and they were assured that the activity by Immigration and Customs Enforcement would be limited in scope, targeting a few thousand illegal immigrants who had defied court orders to deport, not millions.

When Pelosi held a press conference that week, she said she had “called some people of faith” and felt their calls to President Trump “made a difference.”

I asked Tony Suarez, the NHCLC’s executive vice president, about the organization’s relationship with Pelosi. He explained: “The position of the NHCLC has always been to be at the table. It doesn’t matter who else is at the table. We want to be the hands and feet of Jesus to anyone in need and to be like a Nehemiah and be able to speak truth to power and to speak on behalf of the people of God.

“That’s why we felt it was important to be a part of the Faith Advisory Council when we were invited by then candidate Trump,” he continued, noting that he and Sam Rodriguez served on the council as private citizens and not as representatives of NHCLC. “It’s why we felt it was important to be at the table when Speaker Pelosi invited us time and again. That does not mean we condone or endorse everything that each of these elected officials does, but it does mean we are there to be a voice for the voiceless and to be a voice on behalf of the church.”

I’m privileged to be on the board of the NHCLC, so I know firsthand it is a very conservative organization that respects

the rule of law but also believes the Bible commands Christians to be compassionate.

“Those views have led the NHCLC into uncharted territory where they have the ear of both conservative immigration officials inside the White House and progressive Democratic leadership in the House of Representatives,” Brody reported.

Building Mutual Trust

One issue the NHCLC supports is protecting “Dreamers”—young undocumented immigrants who were brought to the US as children—from deportation. In fact Brody reported, “It was this issue that brought the NHCLC and Nancy Pelosi together about a year ago. Since then, the relationship has only gotten better, and a trust has developed despite the closeness that Rodriguez and the NHCLC have with the White House.”

Brody said Pelosi hopes the NHCLC will be a compassionate bridge to the Trump White House.

“She trusts them,” he said, “and the feeling is mutual.”

As for a comprehensive solution to the border crisis, that’s trickier. The NHCLC has made clear to Democratic leaders in the House that Congress must come up with the ultimate solution. Suarez told me, “To get any piece of legislation done, be it immigration, be it something with religious liberty or criminal-justice reform, we know that it has to be done in the halls of Congress. That’s how our government works.”

He explained that Americans sometimes lose focus, thinking the president makes these things happen. “But the White House does not dictate law to our country; it’s done in the halls of Congress,” he said. Like many of us, he’s frustrated with Congress’ inaction. “Some of the personalities that are currently involved—Pelosi, [Chuck] Schumer, [Dick] Durbin, and others—have been in leadership for over two decades. So

they've been a part of these conversations for well over 20 years.

"We have a humanitarian issue at the border, and the people responsible—the only branch of government that is truly responsible for fixing it—still can't come to an agreement," Suarez said.

I share his frustration that for 30 years our elected officials have campaigned on immigration but failed to deliver on their promises. I agree with Suarez when he says, "We've reached the point where we, the people, have to hold elected officials accountable. If you're going to campaign on the issue, then you have to act on the issue."

Before the NHCLC (and the relationships Rodriguez forged with Presidents Bush, Obama and Trump), Hispanic evangelicals had little voice in Washington. In fact, previous administrations and most inside the Beltway viewed all evangelicals with suspicion. {eo}