

# Why Hispanic Evangelical Leaders Are Optimistic About Immigration Reform

Leaders from the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference (NHCLC), which represents more than 16 million evangelicals and over 40,000 U.S. churches, conducted meetings in Washington, D.C., on Wednesday to discuss comprehensive **immigration** reform.

The meetings were with White House officials and Republican leadership, including Speaker of the House John Boehner, R-Ohio; House Majority Leader Eric Cantor; and House Judiciary Chair Bob Goodlatte.

During the discussions, NHCLC leaders sought to dispel Republican fears that the Hispanic community is committed to the Democratic Party and to argue that Hispanic evangelicals have more in common with Republicans on family, faith and religious liberty issues. It is projected that Hispanics will be a majority among evangelicals in the U.S. by 2030.

“If Hispanic America would hear what we heard from Republican leaders today, it would initiate a healing process and likewise serve as a redemptive narrative of reconciling the Republican history with our nation’s largest ethnic group,” says NHCLC President Samuel Rodriguez. “I am cautiously optimistic and confident that people of goodwill will legislate in a way that reunites conviction with compassion.”

Carlos Ortiz, vice president of the NHCLC southeast region, says, “What we just witnessed was a historical moment for the future of our Hispanic American generation.”

NHCLC believes evangelical leaders will play a key role in **immigration** reform. If Republicans do not pass comprehensive

reform, NHCLC leaders argue they will lose any opportunity to win a presidential election for at least the next three contests.

“Republicans in the House have an opportunity to redeem the narrative and build a bridge connecting America’s largest ethnic minority with Abraham Lincoln’s commitment to justice and Ronald Reagan’s faith-filled optimism,” Rodriguez adds. “The 11 million hard-working, family-loving, God-fearing individuals who would be affected by reform and will contribute daily to the spiritual and economic well-being of our nation do not represent an obstacle, but rather an opportunity for a party and a movement.”

Wednesday’s meetings coincided with thousands around the nation joining together for National Pray for Reform Day.

“The Hispanic community—and more specifically the Latino evangelicals—share the core values of the Republican Party,” says Robert Gittelsohn, vice president of governmental affairs for NHCLC. “They agree on almost everything, but passing **immigration reform** is the key to support for the GOP from the Hispanic community. There is now an expectation in the immigrant community that the time for reform has arrived, and they will not look kindly upon any party they deem has obstructed this opportunity.”

NHCLC supports reform focused on three main elements that puts an end to all illegal immigration. First, increasing border protection—including use of infrared, satellite and other technologies, in addition to border patrols. Second, creating a market-driven guest-worker program that provides clear avenues by which millions of undocumented families can obtain legal status in a manner that reflects the Judeo-Christian value system on which this nation was founded. And finally, developing standards for undocumented residents without a criminal record who are earning citizenship status to go to the back of the citizenship line and receive a financial

penalty while acquiring civic and language proficiency and serving the local community.

“Over 1 million children under the age 18, children of undocumented immigrants, many of whom are American citizens, want to remain in their families in this country,” says Albert Reyes, president of Buckner International and an NHCLC board of directors member. “These children are among the most vulnerable in America today with no voice, living in the shadows with uncertainty for their future. I am asking Republican members of the House to do the right thing for these families as an investment into the future of America.”