Congressional Hispanic Caucus Announces Immigration Principles*

As edited by an immigration lawyer, organizer, and advocate.

Mar 6, 2019
Press Release
WASHINGTON—Today, the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Immigration (CHC) Task Force, chaired by Congresswoman Linda T. Sánchez (CA-38), announced CHC’s Immigration Principles for the 116th Congress. “The Congressional Hispanic Caucus, with 38 members strong, will focus on creating equal opportunities for all Americans while pushing back against the Trump Administration's racist and xenophobic policies that target immigrants and Hispanic families,” said Congressman Joaquin Castro (TX-20), Chairman of the Hispanic Caucus. “Today, I’m proud to join my colleagues in unveiling our Immigration Principles, which help outline our immigration agenda as we work to pass laws that acknowledge the dignity and humanity of immigrants comprehensive immigration reform (see comments on CIR below) in order to ensure we have a fair and just immigration system that provides all those who come to our nation a chance to succeed. This Congress, we will continue our work to reunify separated children kidnapped by the U.S. government with their families, protect Dreamers immigrant youth and TPS recipients, and pass legislation to fix our outdated and broken immigration system. Together, we can ensure the rights and dignity of all immigrants who come to our nation based on human rights principles and recognizing the inherent humanity and worth of all persons,” and stay true to the values established by our Founding Fathers. (our founding fathers established a system and a document based on white supremacy – which did not recognize the humanity of those of any gender other than male, and only in particular white men. The Founding Fathers also believed that black communities were only three fifths human, so maybe the CHC should not base its principles on their principles?)

“The United States was built on stolen land from Native tribes. Black slaves were later kidnapped and brought against their will to build this country, along with immigrants, who continue to be used as disposable and exploitable labor by many corporations is and has always been a nation of immigrants. Unfortunately, our broken immigration system puts the American dream out of reach for many who seek a better life in our country. We need comprehensive immigration reform to abolish our current immigration system to create one based on the inherent dignity and humanity of immigrants, that fixes our broken system and deals humanely with the undocumented immigrants already in America,” said Congresswoman Linda Sánchez (CA-38), Chair of the Hispanic Caucus Immigration Task Force and former Chairwoman of the Hispanic Caucus. “Achieving these goals we have laid out today will not be easy, but like our community, the Congressional Hispanic Caucus is not afraid of working hard. We are committed to working in a spirit of cooperation to reform our country’s broken immigration system and give deserving people a chance to become equal members of our society.” The Immigration Task Force also includes Rep. Nydia Velázquez (NY-7), Rep. Raúl Grijalva (AZ-3), Rep. Juan Vargas (CA-51), Rep. Adriano Espallat (NY-13), Rep. Veronica Escobar (TX-16), Rep. Xochitl Torres Small (NM-2), Rep. Sylvia Garcia (TX-29), Rep. Jesus "Chuy" Garcia (IL-4), Rep. Gregorio Sablan (MP), Sen. Bob Menendez (NJ), and Rep. Lou Correa (CA-46). NOTABLE MENTION: Look who is missing from this committee, our progressive Congresswoman from New York, Alexandria Ocasio Cortez.

The Immigration Principles are as follows:

We commit to fighting for:
1. Family Unity/Reunification: No family should be torn apart by border patrol agents at the border, in the interior, nor by our antiquated immigration system that leaves family members waiting for decades to reunify with loved ones. Re-entry bars unnecessarily keep families separated and should be eliminated.

2. Dreamers/Immigrant Youth: Dreamers: Immigrant youth and their parents must should be afforded a timely path to a direct opportunity to apply for citizenship after meeting fair requirements set forth by the United States Congress and their parents should be given an opportunity to access legal permanent status—especially since we believe in principle #1.

3. TPS/DED: Recipients of Temporary Protected Status and Deferred Enforced Departure, the majority of whom have been living legally in the United States for decades, deserve a permanent solution to stay in this country. See principle #1 (again).

4. Smart Border Security = Abolish Customs and Border Patrol & ICE: Border walls are a medieval solution to a modern-day problem and should not be erected. Yes, border walls are medieval, but funding Customs and Border Patrol is inhumane. These are the same agencies caging children and separating families. See Principle #1. There are more effective ways to combat drugs, contraband, and human trafficking at ports of entry.

5. Oversight of ICE and CBP: There should not be an increase in immigrant detention beds. We should end detention. There should be stricter oversight on Immigration and Customs Enforcement’s and Customs and Border Patrol’s budget and operations. Stricter oversight of ICE and CBP will show that ICE and CBP are doing their job and fulfilling their mission. ICE and CBP should be defunded and abolished. This is where there needs to be a new vision for an immigration system that is based on human rights principles. Again, see Principle #1. If we believe families should not be separated, then we cannot fund the agencies that are charged with separating them.

6. Due Process: There must be meaningful due process and accessible legal counsel for all immigrants, as well as, a path to bring home deported veterans. Immigration courts need to be independent from the Department of Justice.

7. New Americans: Resources should be available for individuals attempting to legally enter and stay in this country including reasonable costs and expeditious processing of naturalization and other applications to obtain legal status. These applications must not lead to deportation proceedings and fee waivers must be available for those who cannot afford to pay.

8. Inclusive Comprehensive Creating a Humane Immigration System. “Comprehensive immigration reform” means nothing. It is a catchphrase used by both Democrats and Republicans who can say they support CIR without actually supporting anything other than “border security.” Yes, we need a complete overhaul of our broken immigration law and policy to reframe away from terrorism and national security to the inherent dignity and human rights of all persons, including those in our commonwealths and territories (which the U.S. colonized). If we believe in Principle #1, then our immigration system must ensure that families are not separated or divided by deportations or incarceration. If we believe in Principle #1, then we must have a system that is trauma informed, rather than traumatizing.

9. Transparency: There must be more transparency, oversight, and accountability of the Department of Homeland Security and Department of Health and Human Services. See Principle #1. We must end all detention of immigrants and create a system where immigrants are received at the ports of entries or in the interior to be provided with basic human needs with their families, including access to health services and education. The system should be staffed by humanitarian workers who can assist families and individuals to integrate into the U.S. system and facilitate a process to go through the immigration system so that immigrants can be documented and live without fear or insecurity. Standards for immigrant detainees must be established that include access to health services, physical activity, and basic necessities including water and food.

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The Congressional Hispanic Caucus (CHC), founded in December 1976, is organized as a Congressional Member organization, governed under the Rules of the U.S. House of Representatives. The CHC is dedicated to voicing and advancing, through the legislative process, issues affecting Hispanics in the United States, Puerto Rico and U.S. Territories.