

CLEVELAND BUSINESS

PERSONAL VIEW

Elections show urge for immigration reform

By MARGARET W. WONG

On Nov. 8, the Ohio Independent Film Festival in Cleveland screened "2000 Miles North," a film about 1,000 Guatemalans who live and work in Tuscarawas County in central Ohio. Many of them are in the United States unauthorized, working for Ohio businesses. The day before, Ohioans voted. Once again, Ohio's results reflected the nation, and thus a comprehensive solution to the problem of immigration reform is closer than ever.

In the final gasps of the 109th Congress in 2006, landmark immigration reform was scuttled by hardliners in the House of Representatives. In Ohio, Rep. John Boehner, majority leader in the House, took the lead against bipartisan reform and

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the guest worker program advocated by President Bush, Arizona Sen. John McCain and Massachusetts Sen. Ted Kennedy.

The 2006 election ended the anti-reform majority in the House. With the help of at least one House seat in Ohio, that of outgoing Republican Bob Ney, roadblocks to reform are gone, including some of the loudest and harshest hardliners. Ohio left its mark on the U.S. Senate, too, helping create a majority for compromise in the Senate with the election of Democrat Sherrod Brown.

The message is clear. On immigration, the 2006 midterm elections were a cry for urgent and comprehensive reform. Americans want our lawmakers in the new

Congress to find solutions that will enforce our country's borders in the interests of national security, while protecting and enhancing America's competitiveness in the global marketplace.

Who could imagine that there could be 1,000 Guatemalans, authorized or not, in the entire state of Ohio, let alone Tuscarawas County? But there are, along with thousands more across Ohio, from places like China, India, Russia, every corner of the world, contributing to Ohio's economy.

Of course, immigration reform must include border enforcement. But comprehensive reform also must consider the American economy. The current globalization of business, marketing and culture presents us with the unavoidable challenge

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of maintaining a semi-permeable national membrane that can maintain and protect our economic health.

America could not compete if we closed our doors to both lower skill workers — who do many of the tough jobs Americans won't do — and higher-level corporate executives and skilled workers — who help keep American business competitive in the global marketplace.

The new 110th Congress has a man-

date for comprehensive immigration reform consistent with Kennedy-McCain and other compromise efforts. Businesses in Ohio and across the United States need this reform to stay competitive, and illegal immigrants in this country who work hard every day for Ohio businesses need to come in from the shadows and become valued, legal members of the state's economy.

It's the right thing to do, and Ohio voters helped make it possible this election year. ■