

# The Salt Lake Tribune

## Immigration: Republicans vocal, Dems quiet

By Jennifer W. Sanchez  
The Salt Lake Tribune

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After 40 years of voting but never getting involved in grass-roots politics, Walter Hecht decided after the past presidential election that he wanted to do something this time around.

The 66-year-old Republican said he looked early on at what the presidential hopefuls were saying about his top issues: national security and immigration. Hecht, a St. George resident, organized a group last year to support Barack Obama - who proposes to secure the borders with additional personnel and provide more protection for the nation's major ports, refineries and chemical plants.

Obama isn't just glibly giving the answers everyone wants to hear, Hecht said. "I think he'll make a difference."

Immigration has become a key issue for Republican presidential candidates, while Democrats have been much more muted on the topic.

Republicans "want something done about it," says Dave Hansen, a GOP campaign consultant.

However, Republicans are also much more divided on how they would solve the immigration issue, notes Kirk Jowers, director of the University of Utah's Hinckley Institute of Politics. On one end of the spectrum, Sen. John McCain has supported an immigration reform bill that would provide the undocumented immigrants with a path toward citizenship. At the other end, former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee has called for the deportation of all those in the country illegally. Democrats, by contrast, largely agree on how to tackle the issue. Obama, Sen. Hillary Clinton and former Sen. John Edwards all supported the reform bill that failed to clear Congress last summer.

Just the same, there are those who wish the Democratic hopefuls would take a stronger stand on the immigration issue. Lee Martinez, a Democrat and president of a Salt Lake City-based Latino survey and research company, says Clinton, Obama and Edwards all lack political courage when it comes to the topic.

"Honestly, they don't have a

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backbone and they're not taking positions," he said.

Republicans, at least, are staking out strong positions on the issue - even if they are anti-immigrant - and are determined to make changes as president, Martinez said. Democrats, he added, more often than not avoid the subject.

"They're not being our champions," Martinez said.

But Jowers says the Democrats' unified voice on immigration, quiet though it is, could ultimately give them an advantage.

Obama, Clinton and Edwards don't have to talk tough on the issue, he said, because the public has assigned most of the blame for the failure to reform the nation's immigration laws on the party that has held power for most of the last seven years - the Republicans.

An estimated 12 million undocumented immigrants live in the U.S. After years of debate, Congress has failed to pass any major immigration reform legislation.

So many state lawmakers say it's now up to them to try to control the illegal immigration problem.

Some 1,600 measures related to immigration had been introduced in state legislatures nationwide as of late last year, including a handful in this year's Utah

Legislature. Of these bills, 244 - 16 percent - became law, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

Regardless, experts say that even though immigration is playing a more significant role nationwide, Utah's primary election will come down to personalities.

"In Utah, people will be looking more to the person than to any specific issue, including immigration," Jowers said.

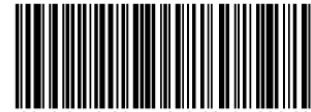
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