

## **Frank Sharry, Executive Director of the National Immigration Forum**

Frank Sharry is one of the nation's leading pro-immigrant advocates. He directs the National Immigration Forum, a Washington DC based organization is in the forefront of the legislative battle to reform our nation's broken immigration system.

In early 2001, Mr. Sharry was one of a small group of thinkers and advocates who helped ignite the migration negotiations between a newly elected President George W. Bush and his counterpart from Mexico, Vicente Fox, an effort which seemed to gaining momentum until the attacks of 9/11 brought the process to an abrupt halt.

But the ideas that percolated in the bilateral negotiations have continued to emerge as the new way to address the complex and controversial immigration riddle. Called comprehensive immigration reform by its proponents, the idea is to combine tough, targeted immigration enforcement with increased legal visas for those here already but without status, and those expected to come in the future to fill jobs and join close family members.

These ideas were at the heart of the immigration reform principles articulated by President Bush in 2004, and are at the heart of bipartisan legislation introduced in 2005 by Senator John McCain, Republican of Arizona, and Senator Edward Kennedy, Democrat of Massachusetts. In the end, Congress approved the Secure Fence Act that authorizes, but does not fund, 700 miles of border fencing.

Just recently, Mr Sharry participated in the Migration Policy Institute's Independent Task Force on Immigration and America's Future. Co-chaired by former Sen. Spencer Abraham (R-MI) and former Rep. Lee H. Hamilton (D-IN), the report addresses the dilemmas of illegal immigration but also seeks to reconcile the need to meet strong economic and social demands for legal immigration with the imperative to strengthen enforcement and safeguard national security. The report argues that the nation's immigration laws are outdated and unsuited to the economic, social, and demographic realities of the 21st century.

As for Mr. Sharry's personal background, he is in some ways a product of America's earlier wave of immigration. One grandfather was an Italian immigrant who came as a boy, worked as a laborer laying train tracks, and was then drafted into the U.S. Navy during World War I. Because of his Italian heritage, the officers assumed he knew how to cook and they made him the Chief Cook of a ship. After the war he parlayed his cooking skills into a successful career as a restaurant owner. His grandfather on the Irish Catholic side of the family was also typical of wave of new Irish. Starting as a street cop, he eventually worked his way up to detective. In fact, when Mr. Sharry's parents got married in 1948, neither the Irish Catholics on one side of the church nor the Italian Catholics on the other side of the church thought much of each other. This mid-century ethnic tension didn't persist for long, but suggests that today's ethnic tensions may not be that different after all.

Mr. Sharry graduated from Princeton University in 1978, speaks fluent Spanish, and has worked with refugees and immigrants overseas, locally, and nationally for 25 years. He appears frequently on television, radio and in print.