

WILDESLOW ON IMMIGRATION

BY MICHAEL WILDES, ESQ.



Welcoming Latin Americans To The United States

Since the beginning of the economic downturn in 2008, the world has undergone a turbulent period of transition in the political and economic status quo. Constant change and the accompanying uncertainty are now characteristic of this transitory period. Accordingly, we cannot yet see the repercussions and unintended consequences of recent events and actions taken by governments and the public during this tumultuous period. Currently, the only certainty seems to be that we will be facing more uncertainty.

Unfortunately, Latin America is not immune to the dynamics of other regions. The spillover from the conflict in the Middle East manifested itself in the attack on the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires in 1992, and on the Jewish community center there two years later, taking a heavy toll in human lives. Regrettably, the perpetrators – allegedly Iran's proxy, Hizbullah – were never brought to justice. Iran's continued economic and political interests are not encouraging.

Venezuela has been a microcosm of conflict in Latin America during the presidency of the anti-western Hugo Chavez. One of the groups on which his policy choices had a bearing on was the Jewish community. Venezuela had an established Jewish community since the 19th century and the country continued to accept Jewish immigrants before and after World War II.

Its Jewish community flourished in large part due to the deep ties and strong sense of patriotism the Jews developed toward their nation. Jews have contributed enormously to Venezuela and built successful careers in business and government service. It is thus particularly disappointing that Venezuelan Jews saw their numbers halved due to emigra-

tion since Chavez took power as president in 1999.

A sense of trepidation and hope fills the remaining Jews of Venezuela today in the aftermath of Hugo Chavez's death. In fact, upon the passing of Venezuela's strongman, many, including the Jewish population, understood that to be a critical juncture for the country's history. In light of the severe economic instability, anti-Semitism and a high crime rate, the Jewish community hoped the ballot-box would present an opportunity to move the country beyond its injurious tendencies, but these ambitions were frustrated: the new Chavista president, Nicolas Maduro's reaction to the Snowden affair showed that he isn't in the least interested in rapprochement with the United States.

There are also serious economic factors encouraging emigration from Venezuela. Chavez and his associates have managed to run a prosperous and resource-rich country into the ground by gutting its economy, nationalizing companies and confiscating property due to his socialist bent. Food shortages are ubiquitous and inflation is rampant, with the local currency losing nearly all of its value.

In addition, Caracas has the highest murder rate, with crime and kidnappings on the rise. Our firm had, on occasion, represented Venezuelan entrepreneurial clients who left for the U.S. following the unlawful confiscation of their property and industrial machinery by the government. By contrast, Venezuelans know that such rights, including the right to private property and the pursuit of free enterprise, are protected by U.S. law. In this respect, America is often looked upon as a harbor of certainty for Venezuelans.

Jewish leaders continue to monitor Venezuela with concern for the country's shrinking Jewish population. After all, there was no love lost between Chavez and the Jewish community: He was the first president to make Jews feel unwelcome in their country. During his tenure, anti-Semitism became a common fact of life, as some local police were believed to have been behind attacks on synagogues. Furthermore, Chavez would use the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to accuse Venezuelan Jews of disloyalty. To this end, he spied on his own Jewish community, broke off diplomatic ties with Israel and embraced Iran's vitriolic former leader, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Finding a safe haven from economic depravity, bigotry and rampant crime would be a wise, logi-

cal and the right investment for Venezuelan Jews when planning for the future. It also makes sense for their children's sake to give them the opportunity to grow up in a healthy and safe environment. Fortunately, U.S. immigration laws open doors for various types of entry.

One alternative is to invest in the United States, which enables foreigners to open businesses and stay for an extended period of time. While this type of visa has to be renewed every two years, there is no limit to how many times one can renew it, effectively allowing extended stay in this country, as long as the owner controls the investment.

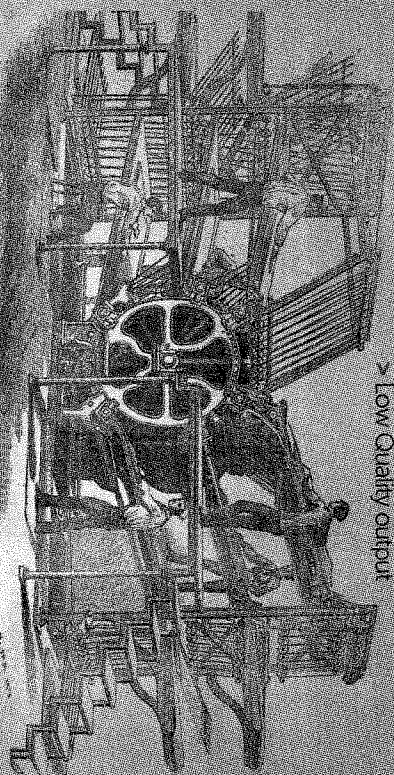
Other options include sponsorships by employers under the H-1B visa program, whose numbers allotted each year are capped but with the possible passage of immigration reforms, that number may be increased or vary according to the needs and state of the U.S. economy. Should political and economic conditions deteriorate regionally, which is neither unlikely nor unknown to Latin America, some immigrants may also apply for political asylum in the U.S.

The U.S. always helped those in search of safe harbor and freedom. The importance attached to the safety and well-being of children and the future generation necessitates finding a place that will welcome them with open arms and allow them the opportunities that make the United States the most coveted destination in the world.

As the greatest experiment of democracy in history, the United States offers a valuable lesson in the importance of a community's participation in public affairs in order to influence the government to protect our freedoms and renew our vitality. We appreciate the cultural depth members of the Venezuelan community bring with them. We are sympathetic to the fact that some are willing to leave behind what they built so ardently over the decades and start over. And the United States can also greatly benefit from the presence of such a cohesive and well-organized community, which has the potential to make a positive, powerful and deep impact in public life, ensuring opportunities of liberty and prosperity for generations to come.

WildesLaw on Immigration is a new monthly column by Michael J. Wildes, a managing partner

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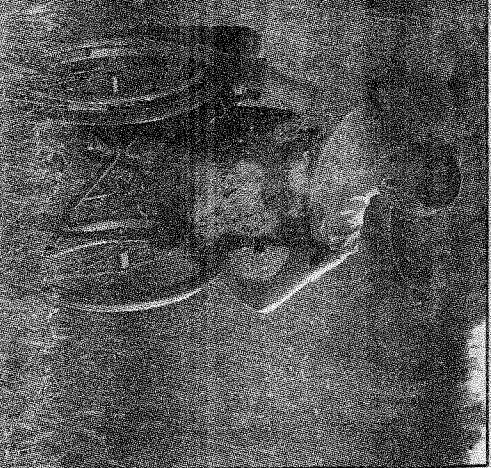
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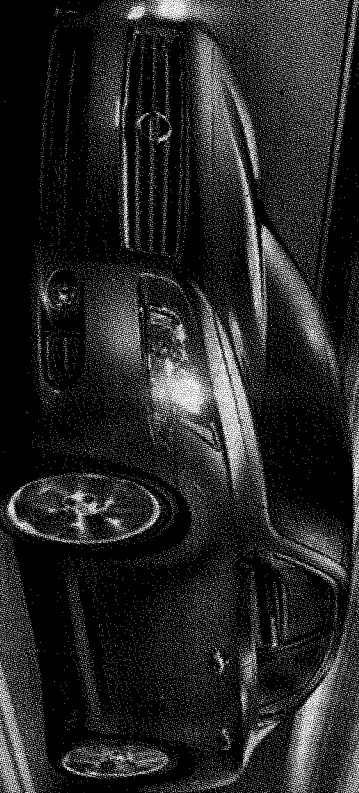
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of Wildes and Weinberg, P.C. Wildes is a former federal prosecutor with the United States Attorney's Office in Brooklyn (1989-1993). Wildes is an adjunct professor of Business Immigration Law at the Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law in New York. From 2004 through 2010, Wildes was also the mayor of Englewood, NJ, where he resides. Wildes and Weinberg, P.C., has offices in New York, New Jersey and Florida. If you would like to contact Michael Wildes with specific immigration questions, email him at michael@wildeslaw.com or visit the firm's website at www.wildeslaw.com.

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