



November 10, 2015

Ford Salutes President Obama's Bid to "Ban the Box" in America

Recently, in a major policy speech in Newark, New Jersey, highlighting the reentry process of formerly-incarcerated individuals, President Obama called for "banning the box" for applicants for most federal positions. "Ban the Box" refers to removing the question on employment applications which asks if the applicant has ever been convicted of a felony. Over 70 million people in America are shut out of job opportunities, including job promotions, because of a previous criminal background. Many of these job applications are discarded even before the person has a chance to show their skills and abilities or even explain what happened when they were convicted. I salute and praise the stance that President Obama has taken on the issue. This move will not guarantee anyone a job, just as obtaining a degree from an institute of high learning does not guarantee a job. However, the President's move sends a message that the American people should at least have an opportunity to be considered for a job for which they are qualified. The President's "Ban the Box" endorsement is a small step toward the change needed by the American people if we want to be "Great Again". Opening the door for skilled and qualified individuals to become tax-payers is better than any "get tough-on-crime" laws we could ever pass in Springfield or in Washington.

When President Obama announced his strategy for "banning the box", it was a proud day for me, because I campaigned on the "Ban the Box" issue in 2006, promising that I would bring that change to Illinois. I first introduced "Ban the Box" legislation for state employment in 2007 and passed it as my first bill in the Illinois House of Representatives, and it also was approved by the Illinois Senate. The governor vetoed the legislation, however, and the fight continued. In 2013, I worked closely with stakeholders and then-Governor Quinn, who signed an Administrative Order so Illinois became a "Ban the Box" state for most state agencies. I also co-sponsored legislation in Springfield to "Ban the Box" at big box stores in Illinois like Wal-Mart and Target.

According to the White House, the President has called on Congress to follow a growing number of states, cities, and private companies that have decided to "Ban the Box" on job applications. Congress is considering bipartisan legislation that would "Ban the Box" for federal hiring and hiring by federal contractors. In the meantime, the President is directing the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to take action where it can by modifying its rules to delay inquiries into criminal history until later in the hiring process. While most agencies already have taken this step, this action will better ensure that applicants from all segments of society, including those with prior criminal histories, receive a fair opportunity to compete for federal employment.

When the 70 million people with criminal backgrounds join with their family and friends to fight for their rights as Americans to be truly re-integrated into our American employment process, we will truly see another civil rights movement for all of humanity. This issue really does affect every family in America, regardless of race. This is one fight for justice and equality which is today's civil rights movement for all people - not just a movement for Blacks - but one that should bring us all together to change the way America treats those who are ready to be treated as the American they were born as. Let us continue the fight for a more fair and just America.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. Ford', with a stylized flourish at the end.

La Shawn K. Ford
State Representative-Eighth District