

WILSON TALKS TOUGH ON IMMIGRATION

San Jose Mercury News (California)

September 18, 1994 Sunday MORNING FINAL EDITION

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Section: CALIFORNIA NEWS; Pg. 3B

Length: 835 words

Byline: PHILIP J. TROUNSTINE AND JEFF GOTTLIEB, Mercury News Staff, Writers

Dateline: San Diego

Body

The immigration issue boiled over again in the California governor's race on Saturday, as Gov. Pete Wilson scoffed at the Clinton administration's attempts to address the issue and challenger Kathleen Brown's campaign team ripped into Wilson, charging that he has made a bad situation worse.

In his most muscular speech on the issue thus far in the campaign, Wilson told members of the California Republican Party that Proposition 187, which would eliminate government services to unlawful immigrants, is "the two-by-four we need to make them take notice in Washington . . . to accept its (the federal government's) responsibility for illegal immigration."

Meanwhile, in the U.S. Senate race, even as Rep. Michael Huffington was stirring up enthusiasm among hundreds of GOP delegates gathered here, Sen. Dianne Feinstein's campaign released two acerbic TV ads labeling the congressman "a Texas oil millionaire whom Californians just can't trust."

Later, in a meeting that Huffington had tried, unsuccessfully, to limit to nine invited reporters, the Santa Barbara Republican responded by threatening to attack the financial dealings of his Democratic rival and her husband, investment banker Richard Blum.

Wilson's speech -- with its heavy emphasis on immigration -- was delivered to an audience of appreciative listeners who view his comeback from more than 20 points down in the polls to nearly 10 points ahead as a resurrection of sorts for their party.

As San Diego City Councilwoman Judy McCarty put it: "It's so much fun to be a Republican again . . . we're salivating here."

Reno assisting Brown

While Wilson was speaking, Attorney General Janet Reno was in Los Angeles, helping Brown by offering new and repackaged programs to address the issue. She announced a pilot program to reallocate some agents from two inland checkpoints and, as part of "Operation Gatekeeper," pledged 220 more border guards within the next 100 days.

"They are desperately eager to apply bandages to the lacerated and hemorrhaging credibility of the White House and the Kathleen Brown campaign," Wilson said in his speech. But, "Anything that falls short of securing our border and providing full reimbursement for California's costs of illegal immigration just ain't enough."

In remarks to reporters, Wilson objected to the idea of beefing up the border with agents made available by "cannibalizing" inland checkpoints where he said drugs are confiscated.

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And he responded to a news report in the San Diego Union-Tribune noting that in 1983 Wilson was co-author of a provision that made it more difficult for the Immigration and Naturalization Service to raid farms to check for undocumented workers.

It remains his position, he said, that the INS should have to obtain search warrants before searching farms for illegal immigrants. It was that requirement, according to the Union-Tribune, that resulted in the INS giving up on farm searches.

Following Wilson's comments to the media, Brown spokesman Steve Glazer said Wilson was operating with an "amnesia strategy where he hopes that the voters never can recall any of the earlier promises that he has made."

In his remarks to reporters, Huffington said he would take a position on Proposition 187 before the election. However, he said that illegal immigrants should not be denied health care, which is part of the initiative.

No stand on initiatives

"There are lots of initiatives, and I just haven't taken a position on them," he said. So far, there are seven initiatives.

Huffington, who held his first press conference of the campaign, tried to limit the reporters who attended. But when some reporters who had been invited refused to attend unless it was opened to all journalists, Huffington's campaign finally agreed after a 25-minute standoff.

In a novel twist, Huffington characterized his plan to cut the capital gains tax from 28 percent to 10 percent as a boost for the middle class. He argued that homeowners would benefit when they sell their houses.

Huffington also attacked the way legislators are influenced by lobbyists. "They have senators, I'm sure, and congressmen on their payrolls."

Pressed to explain, Huffington said he did not mean to say that legislators are actually on company payrolls, but that "some" who take contributions from political action committees are unduly influenced.

Wants water for farmers

He repeated his call for less stringent environmental regulations, even though he once was a board member of the Natural Resources Defense Council, one of the largest environmental groups in the country. "I think there's been enough water diverted to the fish," he said, arguing that the farmers need it instead.

The Feinstein campaign's 30-second commercials, which began running across the state Saturday, picked up a theme the senator will use for the remainder of the campaign, said Bill Carrick, her media adviser -- that Huffington cannot be trusted and he is a carpetbagger from Texas.

Graphic

Photo;

PHOTO: ASSOCIATED PRESS

Pete Wilson and candidate for lieutenant governor Cathie Wright stand together at a luncheon.

940918 CA 3B 2

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

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Subject: US REPUBLICAN PARTY (92%); US STATE IMMIGRATION LAW (90%); IMMIGRATION (90%); CAMPAIGNS & ELECTIONS (90%); LEGISLATIVE BODIES (90%); ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS (89%); US FEDERAL GOVERNMENT (89%); BORDER CONTROL (88%); CITIZENSHIP (78%); SEARCH WARRANTS (78%); US CONGRESS (78%); US STATE GOVERNMENT (78%); POLITICAL PARTIES (77%); FOREIGN LABOR (73%); GOVERNORS (73%); US SENATE ELECTIONS (72%); POLLS & SURVEYS (69%); WEALTHY PEOPLE (68%); WRITERS (67%)

Industry: BROADCAST ADVERTISING (72%); WRITERS (67%)

Person: DIANNE FEINSTEIN (58%)

Geographic: SAN DIEGO, CA, USA (91%); LOS ANGELES, CA, USA (79%); SANTA BARBARA, CA, USA (73%); CALIFORNIA, USA (94%); UNITED STATES (92%)

Load-Date: October 25, 2002

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