

Opinion: Democrats no better on immigration than GOP

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Body

SAN DIEGO -- Recently, I gave Republicans some advice about how to talk about the **immigration** issue -- and, just as importantly, how not to talk about it.

Now it's the **Democrats** turn. They make their share of mistakes in discussing one of the most sensitive and controversial issues on the national agenda, and they need just as much coaching as do Republicans.

To begin with, **Democrats** need to stop thinking of themselves as inherently more enlightened than the competition when it comes to the **immigration** debate, and let their actions prove it. Many liberals take for granted that most Republicans are nativists, and they're glad they don't have that failing. This fulfills the basic need of many on the left to feel morally superior to the rest of us and reaffirms the idea that they alone can come up with a solution to our **immigration** problem.

I don't know about that. I get angry and racist e-mails from self-described liberal **Democrats** all the time, usually after I've defended Sarah Palin or praised George W. Bush. Such ugliness isn't limited to one political party. Besides, I'd wager that, once you brush away all the lofty rhetoric, most **Democrats** ultimately care about the same thing that most Republicans care about -- winning elections and maintaining power.

And so, **no** matter what they promise while campaigning, they will stall or kill any legislation that threatens to cost them votes. That's why, even with **Democrats** controlling Congress since January 2007 and the White House since January 2009, nothing got done on **immigration** reform. In fact, it was a **Democrat** -- former White House Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel -- who famously referred to the issue as the "third rail" of American politics.

Next, **Democrats** need to stop pandering to organized labor, which is a group that is always predisposed to view **immigration** as a problem because it sees immigrants as competition. Many unions have come around to the idea of legalizing illegal immigrants because it means a chance to enlist new members, but not if it means swallowing the **GOP**'s demand to bring in additional batches of temporary guest workers. Organized labor believes that foreign workers of any kind -- legal or illegal -- threaten U.S. workers. And it contributes enough money to **Democrats** to get them to believe it too.

The left should make the argument to union workers that a completely legalized work force would benefit them because employers could **no** longer pay illegal workers less than those with a union card. **Democrats** might also throw in a dose of tough love by telling those union workers that, if they're suffering the embarrassment of being displaced by unauthorized, low-skilled, largely uneducated workers who often don't speak English, it might be time to acquire more skills or look for another line of work.

Lastly, **Democrats** should kick the habit of using the **immigration** issue to manipulate Latinos. They can't resist exploiting how tone-deaf the **GOP** can be on the **immigration** issue, perhaps assuming: "What alternative do Hispanic voters have?"

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Consider the liberal reader who recently wrote to take issue with my contention that President Barack Obama was wise to support the tax-cut compromise. The reader insisted that Obama was foolish to try to "make people who despise him play nice" and that the **GOP** was sure to thwart the rest of his agenda. And then the reader threw in this gratuitous item at the end: "**Good** luck with the Dream Act, btw."

So, in response to a column about tax cuts, a reader makes sure to inform a Mexican-American columnist that Republicans are unlikely to pass a bill that gives undocumented immigrants legal status if they attend college or join the military? What does one have to do with the other?

As a party, **Democrats** need to show some respect. If those on the left think a piece of legislation makes sense, then pass it. Don't use it a ploy or hold it out as a carrot to make a donkey pull a cart. When dealing with the **immigration** issue, **Democrats** should spend more time resolving obstacles -- and less time looking for ways to get mileage out of the impasse.

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