

## **LEADER TURNS TO FAMILIAR PATTERN**

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### **Body**

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I thought U.S. Rep. Ginny Brown-Waite had already locked up the xenophobe vote.

Remember, she slammed the French for failing to support our disastrous invasion of Iraq in 2003. Three years later she backed Republican ally Mary Ann Hogan, who had called Islam "a hateful, frightening religion."

Brown-Waite has been a leading backer of the misguided idea that we can control immigration by walling off all of Mexico.

So did she really need to burnish her credentials by calling for a federal investigation into the case of Rigoberto Martinez?

Sure, she makes some valid points.

The Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office briefly arrested Martinez, 20, the ***leader*** of a trio of undocumented immigrants accused in a string of robberies and sexual assaults in Hillsborough and Pinellas counties.

We need to hear more from the Sheriff's Office and other agencies about why Martinez was released 10 days before the final attack. We shouldn't forget, as Brown-Waite wrote in a news release, that "the lives of several Florida women have been permanently scarred by these brutal rapes."

But U.S. Rep. Kathy Castor, a Democrat whose district includes Tampa, and who shares these concerns, responded by quietly drafting a letter to federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

Brown-Waite, R-Brooksville, meanwhile, issued a news release under this blaring headline:

"REP. BROWN-WAITE CALLS FOR FEDERAL INVESTIGATION OF EVENTS SURROUNDING HORRIFIC ILLEGAL IMMIGRANT CRIME SPREE."

It brings to mind a horde of banditos, doesn't it?

Yes, because it's part of a timeless political strategy: Inflate a foreign threat and you look that much better for taking it on.

I'm no advocate of open borders, and I agree with some of Brown-Waite's more thoughtful positions on immigration, including that employers should be more accountable for knowingly hiring undocumented workers.

But I've never seen a reason to be terrified of desperately poor Mexicans seeking work that most of us don't want to do, such as laying sod and cleaning hotel rooms.

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When these jobs are plentiful, the percentage of immigrants in our work force climbs, reaching a recent peak in 2000, according to the private, nonprofit Immigration Policy Center.

When the jobs dry up, the center found, that percentage declines.

Also, though our jails are crowded with undocumented immigrants facing deportation, they are held on criminal charges only one-fifth as often as native-born Americans, according to a University of California-Irvine study cited by the policy center.

By and large, I think, undocumented immigrants move here for reasons we can all identify with, such as trying to feed their families. And they and their offspring tend to be at least as grateful as the rest of us for the opportunities offered in the United States.

Take Henry Cejudo, who won wrestling gold at the recent Beijing Olympics.

Put his story in all caps and it would go something like this:

"SON OF ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS BRINGS CREDIT TO U.S.; LAVISHLY PRAISES HIS FAMILY'S ADOPTED HOMELAND"

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