

Governor out to retake Latino voters; IMMIGRATION DEBATE HAS BLEND SUPPORT FROM RE-ELECTION CAMPAIGN

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Body

In recent weeks, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger has worked overtime to reclaim support from Latino voters, seeking to shore up a key vulnerability as he seeks a second term.

His latest outreach effort came Tuesday, when his campaign unveiled a list of statewide supporters dubbed "Hispanic Families for Arnold." On the same day, he also appointed David Lopez of the National Hispanic University in San Jose to the state board of education.

The Republican governor enjoyed unusually high support from Latinos in the 2003 recall election, but his popularity among that group plummeted after a series of miscues -- praising the controversial Minutemen border patrollers and pursuing what many considered an elitist agenda last year. He also angered some Latino voters by vetoing bills that would grant driver's licenses to illegal immigrants.

Even as Schwarzenegger has steered clear of the strident anti-illegal immigration politics dominating Republicans nationally, recent polls have found tepid Latino support for his re-election.

"He's not going to be re-elected if he doesn't get one-third of the Latino vote; that's just simple mathematics" and also about what Schwarzenegger earned in 2003, said California Target Book co-editor Tony Quinn, who has analyzed ethnic voting patterns for more than two decades. "No Republican has won the state for president or for governor without getting a third of the Latino vote."

Now, Schwarzenegger and his advisers are trying to make amends and carve new inroads with the fastest-growing segment of the electorate, who make up about 19 percent of the state's voters.

The governor spoke at the National Council of La Raza convention over the weekend in Los Angeles. In May, he and Democratic Assembly Speaker Fabian Núñez hosted Mexican President Vicente Fox in California, and he is planning a trade mission to Mexico in August.

Schwarzenegger's campaign recently hired former Univisión political analyst Arnoldo Torres, a past executive director of the League of United Latin American Citizens.

Note to Angelides

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The **governor**'s recent outreach, said Louis DeSipio, an associate professor of political science at the University of California-Irvine, should come as a warning of sorts for Phil Angelides, the Democrat running against him in the Nov. 7 **election**.

"Mr. Angelides, in his primary **campaign**, didn't really make much of an effort at all to reach **out** to **Latino voters**," DeSipio said. "If that pattern continues to the general **election**, a third of the vote should be quite easy for Gov. Schwarzenegger."

A top aide in the Angelides **campaign** disputed that notion, listing a number of high-profile **Latino** elected officials, such as Núñez, and union leaders who stumped for Angelides. "These are stellar elected officials who have the credibility of the Hispanic community behind them," said Daniel Chavez, deputy **campaign** manager.

Angelides enjoys an enviable lead among Latinos in early polling. A San Jose State University survey released last week showed him leading Schwarzenegger 58 percent to 12 percent, while the Public Policy Institute of California showed Angelides ahead 47 percent to 26 percent before the June primary was settled. And Angelides enjoys the endorsements of big-name Latinos, such as United Farm Workers icon Dolores Huerta.

Among the **Latino** business and political leaders standing with Schwarzenegger at the first Hispanic Families for Arnold event in Southern California on Tuesday was Leo Lacayo, a publicly elected member of the San Francisco Republican Party.

Had the **campaign** asked him to **support** Schwarzenegger a few weeks ago, Lacayo would have declined because of a perception that the **governor** was being harsh toward illegal immigrants. Now, he's excited to "take the message forward."

"The **governor**'s had a complete change of heart in how he's addressed the Hispanic community -- he's very strong on the message for a comprehensive **immigration** reform act," Lacayo said.

A representative for the California Democratic Party classified Schwarzenegger's effort as "too little, too late."

"More than anybody else, **Latino voters** are seeing through this whole charade," Roger Salazar said. "They understand the only reason he's **out** there pandering to them is because of how low he is in the polls among **Latino voters**."

While courting Latinos, the **governor** is striking a careful balance. Tilt too far in either direction and he could alienate **Latino voters** or drive off conservative Republicans on issues such as illegal **immigration**.

He initially hesitated about sending the National Guard to help patrol the Mexican border before cooperating. Over the objections of the GOP, the **governor** tried unsuccessfully to include in the state budget some money for health insurance for undocumented children, saying it was wrong to "politicize" kids.

Lasting resentment

Although Latinos are mostly registered as Democrats, they are known to side with conservatives on some social issues, such as opposition to gay marriage. But the California GOP is still struggling to overcome lingering resentment from Proposition 187, the anti-illegal immigrant measure passed by **voters** in 1994 but largely invalidated by the courts.

This year, Schwarzenegger is touting an increase in school funding, a push to expand health coverage for the uninsured and the Jessica's Law crackdown on sexual predators.

"If you look at polls that show what **Latino voters** care about," said Gregory Rodriguez, Irvine senior fellow with the New America Foundation, "it's very similar to what other **voters** care about: health care, education and crime."

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The **governor** is getting ``back to his roots" on a number of fronts after last year's failed special **election**, acknowledged senior **campaign** adviser Torres, who chalked up some of the **governor's** past gaffes to a lack of ``good advice."

Angelides, he hinted, cannot take Latinos for granted. ``We've got to have both parties competing for our needs."

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