

## **Opinion: Ruben Navarrette Jr.: Feisty Hispanic Republican makes waves in Arizona**

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### **Body**

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SAN DIEGO -- In these times, it's not easy being a **Hispanic Republican**.

Take it from DeeDee Garcia Blase of Scottsdale, **Ariz.** The 39-year-old Mexican-American political activist and Air Force veteran is a force of nature. She is the founder of Somos **Republicans**, a grass-roots **Hispanic Republican** organization that acts as a guerrilla insurgency against the GOP establishment. After just two years, the group claims 6,000 members in a dozen states.

While the marquee Latino organizations on the left are AWOL in much of the immigration war because they don't have the stomach to criticize President Barack Obama for breaking promises and for increasing deportations, Garcia Blase's group is always spoiling for a fight. It battles against **Arizona**'s immigration law, which recently sustained another legal defeat when a federal appeals court affirmed a lower court ruling that struck down most of it, and copycat versions around the country. It lobbies in favor of the Dream Act, which would give those immigrant students who Obama claims are not being deported (when they are) a shot at a legal status. And it pushes for what it is calling a "Compact with America," which urges lawmakers across the country to engage the immigration debate in a mature, civilized and constructive way.

For one thing, she lives in the intolerance capital of the United States. The most recent offering from **Arizona**: a "birther" bill that would have required presidential candidates to produce birth certificates. The measure was mercifully vetoed by Gov. Jan Brewer.

Being a Latino **Republican** in **Arizona** is like being a deer in favor of hunting season. In fact, Garcia Blase is often asked: "How can you be in a party that hates you?" Answer: Because she loves her party, and she doesn't think the haters constitute a fair representation of the GOP.

"I started the group so people would know that not all **Republicans** are like (Maricopa County Sheriff) Joe Arpaio and (state Senate President) Russell Pearce," she told me.

Somos **Republicans** doesn't play favorites. Garcia Blase likes challenging fellow **Republicans** as much as tweaking Democrats.

"I put people before party," she said. "The uber-liberals want to cooperate with us. They say, 'DeeDee has backbone.' Democrat or **Republican makes** no difference. If you're trying to hurt my people, I'm going to (expletive) you up."

Lately, Garcia Blase has been taking calls from **Arizona** Democrats who are upset that some of their legislative leaders are trying to regain the support of Anglo voters by trying to out-demagogue the **Republicans** on immigration. While up to the task, she complains that this really should be someone else's job.

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"Where are the Democratic organizations?" she asked. "I have enough on my plate going after racist Republicans. I don't have time to police racist Democrats too."

Garcia Blase rankles the leaders of the Maricopa County Republican Party because, in media interviews, she states the obvious: that Arizona Republicans such as Brewer and Pearce are, for short-term political gain, dooming the party to eventual irrelevance. Just as America is becoming more Latino, the Arizona GOP is becoming more hostile to Latinos. Not smart.

The maddening part is that the group being turned away by Republicans is conservative -- on taxes, abortion, gay marriage, defense and other issues. In 1984, when San Antonio-based Hispanic advertising pioneer Lionel Sosa told President Ronald Reagan that he had to persuade Latinos to vote Republican, Reagan responded that Latinos were already Republicans but "just don't know it."

Reagan called for legalizing the undocumented in the 1984 presidential campaign and eventually signed an amnesty bill in 1986. Were he alive today, he probably wouldn't make it out of the Arizona primary. But, you'd better believe, he'd have one feisty guerrilla leader at his side.

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