

GOP alienating Hispanic voters

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Immigration rhetoric from GOP presidential candidates has soared over the top and into the stratosphere. Republicans must be betting they won't need Latino voters in the future. We think it's a bad bet.

Latinos are the fastest-growing demographic group in the country, and they are unlikely to forget which party produces madcap ideas such as erecting an electrified fence between them and the country where many of their grandmothers live.

Latino support helped put Barack Obama in the White House, but the president's failure to push comprehensive immigration reform left some looking for an alternative.

Instead of opening the door to American Latinos, the GOP turned off the porch light.

Prominent Republicans once led the push for the Dream Act - a most benign immigration proposal.

These days, Texas Gov. Rick Perry takes his political life in his hands for merely supporting in-state college tuition for undocumented children.

And after Mitt Romney attacks Perry as too soft on immigration, Perry fires back at Romney: "You had illegals working on your property."

Illegals? Something tells us that dismissive description of human beings isn't lost on Mexican Americans who vote.

Republican Sen. John McCain once reminded his party they were "God's children."

Arizona Republicans such as McCain and U.S. Sen. Jon Kyl once led the way on humane reform. GOP Rep. Jeff Flake was, until recently, a stalwart on comprehensive reform of our immigration laws.

Today in the party, there is no deviation from the hard line.

Yet free-market libertarians such as Dan Griswold of the Cato Institute cite the failure of the enforcement-only approach, and they list the economic benefits that comprehensive reform would bring.

"The Republican Party is going to assign itself to minority status if they continue the demagogic rhetoric," Griswold told a recent immigration conference in Tucson.

Herman Cain, now a top-tier candidate, won applause for touting an electrified border fence that would be powerful enough to kill - kill - illegal border crossers. The line drew wild applause from conservative audiences. So crossing the border illegally is now a capital crime in GOP eyes?

Michele Bachmann wants a double-wall fence. This self-proclaimed fiscal conservative doesn't flinch at the cost or seem to understand that the Border Patrol told Congress on Oct. 4 the existing fence already covers all the areas where it is "operationally required."

Instead of pandering to immigration restrictionists, GOP candidates would be wiser to talk about the complexities of this problem. The 2010 census put the number of Latinos in the country at 50.5 million. The number of undocumented immigrants - who are not all Latino - is estimated at about 11 million.

Republicans who continue to alienate tens of millions of Latino citizens are not just doing a disservice to Latino Americans and the nation, which needs comprehensive immigration reform. They are gambling with their party's future.

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<http://www.azcentral.com/arizonarepublic/opinions/articles/2011/10/23/20111023republican-hispanic-voters-editorial.html#ixzz1bhmJw0vc>