

Conservatives treat illegal immigrants from Cuba quite differently, and it shows

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Former GOP Florida Gov. Jeb Bush set off the latest Republican immigration controversy, stating on Fox News that illegal immigration is often “an act of love,” more than a crime, as many undocumented workers are here merely out of a desire to better their families.

“If they want a better life so bad, why don’t they rise up and fix their own cess pool,” retorted Jim Walker, a Republican candidate for the Michigan House, responding to a Facebook post about Bush’s comments.

The sniping from national voices was only slightly less fierce. Radio talker Laura Ingraham asserted that bank robbers might be doing it out of love as well. Former Florida GOP Congressman Allen West proclaimed his former governor a good example for why conservatives might start a third party. And conservative Twitter goddess Michelle Malkin created the #CancelJebBush hashtag.

What got into Jeb?

It seems all those Cubans fleeing Castro to come to his home state without the explicit written permission of two governments has messed with his head and made him think people who don't have freedom and opportunity at home naturally run away and find somewhere that might give it to them.

So what kind of national identity do you end up with when you let people just show up uninvited?

(Hint: The Wampanoag Tribe of early 17th century Massachusetts also did a horrible job of securing their border.)

Despite what is often claimed, today’s uninvited immigrants are not deadbeats draining the welfare state. More than 8 million of the approximately 12-plus million have otherwise legal American jobs. Many if not most of the rest are the families of this enormous workforce, which is nearly large enough to fill every job in Florida.

“Immigration and the Welfare State,” a report from the free-market Cato Institute, shows immigrants have higher rates of employment participation than the native-born, and male “undocumented” residents have the highest labor force participation rate of all.

Of course, a large number are Hispanic.

“If you have Hispanics in your district, they're already voting against you,” says strident conservative scribbler Ann Coulter.

Following this logic earned Mitt Romney just 27 percent of the Hispanic vote in 2012 - the worst GOP showing in 16 years.

Two Presidential elections earlier, George W. Bush, using his brother's songbook despite the handicap of his fellow conservatives often shrieking a different tune, racked up 40 percent of Hispanics. In his final election as Texas governor - a state where 38 percent identify as Hispanic - he got 40 percent of the Hispanic vote. His successor, Rick Perry, stuck with the reasonable rhetoric regarding illegal immigration and got 38 percent in his 2010 re-election.

But that's Texas: Florida's population is 23 percent Hispanic. In 2010, Republican Marco Rubio, from Florida's enormous Cuban population, snagged 55 percent of the Hispanic vote on his way to the U.S. Senate.

Florida's different: Cuban exiles have mostly not been expected to “fix their own cess pool.” We endorse their “illegal” immigration. An otherwise illegal “border violation” is retroactively legitimized if a Cuban exile is lucky and/or clever enough to sneak past our perimeter security and plant their feet on U.S. soil. But we don't let them in if caught at sea.

Though they both often arrive the same way, and work their tails off every bit as much, Cuban “illegals” are treated much differently than other Hispanics - particularly by conservatives. It shows at the polls.

Perhaps the former Florida governor knows his party can expect Hispanic support if conservatives start accusing the undocumented workers of love rather than lawbreaking.