

Casa de Maryland or Misery of Immigration Reform Activism

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I've decided to make this entry not only to say why I am so disgusted with the current activism on immigration, which is currently wasting what in other circumstances would have been an excellent opportunity to have things done, but also, and much more important, in the naïve hope that, believing as I once believed that Daily Kos should be a place where liberals gather to exchange ideas and plan some intelligent action, somebody else takes this cause from where I'm leaving it.

Dedicated to the next Joaquin Luna, who will unfortunately fall in the same deep, dark hopelessness that claimed the life of Joaquin, that same hopelessness that is the only possible result of the immense mediocrity of the current pro-immigrant leadership.

After trying so many times to give some feedback and propose some alternative line of action to Emmy Ruiz, Immigration Campaign Manager of Organizing for Action (or to whoever process information for Emmy Ruiz), I visited some of the events sponsored by Organizing for Action. It's not the first time the grassroots movement Obama created under this or other names to supposedly support his agenda has addressed immigration as an issue and, like the rest of the traditional Hispanic leadership, its efforts has not been precisely crowned with success. When you drag an uninterrupted record of failure for years, you should at least be curious about what others have to say, especially if they express commitment with an alternative line of action that could be worth the pain trying, especially because what you're doing is not working.

At that moment, my expectation visiting those events was to find intelligent, like-minded activists unsatisfied with the present results and with enough determination to fight not for a faint but for a positive change. I failed in this too and sometimes it was particularly depressing to find people who showed even hostility when you provided them with the facts that demonstrated that they were taking not the right medicine to cure their illness and preferred instead taking the traditional medicine, no matter how useless it was to cure the illness, just because they had gotten used to its flavor.

In one of these events I met a nice activist through who I channeled my concerns to a local supposedly pro-immigrant organization, Casa de Maryland. I was proposing a low-budget line of action that could be way to begin addressing the problem I am going to present after this introduction. Uninterested in the solution or in the problem, once again Kim Propeack showed why her organization is proud of unrepentantly providing failure since I began following this issue in 2004.

1. You have already enough sympathy

The Kennedy-McCain bill of 2005 at some point reached in the polls about 60% of public support, as did the Specter bill of 2006, and the Kennedy-Kyl bill of 2007, despite being a clearly inferior bill, reached up to 72% of public support, as the Schumer bill of this year did. You have enough public support to pass the bill if passing a bill were the result of public sympathy.

Unfortunately it's not. Just remember the Background Checks bill on gun control, that reached up to 92% of public support and it still was sunk in Congress. More, even though polls showed the constituents of a number of districts favoring background checks, the congressmen of those districts still refused to support the bill. That should have taught us that, especially in the gerrymandered districts with which we will have to live in the next years, the opinion of their constituents is much less audible to these congressmen than the angry threats of the Tea Party. Unfortunately Kim Propeack didn't pay attention to that lesson.

Thus, as if their main problem were a public support of under 30%, case in which the image of the Dreamers holding hands with a colorful choreography in the background or telling moving ethnic stories, immigrants dancing with flags on the streets and even the more serious Phone Banks calling constituents of these heavily gerrymandered districts could have a noticeable effect. If you are the leader of one of these institutions, you should know this. You should also know that if you have been beaten all these years, it has not been because of lack of general public support and you should study experiences like the NumbersUSA experience of 2007; you should be willing to learn from your enemy and from history.

Said this, even though the xenophobic right has an efficient machine for their messaging of misinformation, they owe their success basically to the volunteers and fundraising they can bring to the districts of their interest.

- a) Knowing this, you should wonder whether you can win this war with only one independent PAC, Immigrant's List, which in 2008 couldn't even get the congressmen in the swing districts of their interest to accept their money because the immigration issue was radioactive over there.
- b) Knowing this, you should wonder whether Kim Propeack can do something really useful focusing the assets of Casa de Maryland on the congressmen of Maryland when she should be interested in identifying the congressmen from Virginia, Pennsylvania and North Carolina whose districts fit the profile mentioned above.

If I were a Republican moving from Maryland to Oklahoma to deliver the electoral districts of Oklahoma to the Republican candidate, my effort would be certainly laughable and I should not expect anybody to take me seriously. I don't see why Propeack's approach in Maryland should be seen differently.

With a recent Supreme Court decision breaking the teeth of the Voting Civil Rights Act and Texas, North Carolina and Virginia ready to pass state legislation to disenfranchise minority voters, the most interesting place to begin for Casa de Maryland should be the gubernatorial race of Virginia of this year in order to, with the governor in its side, prevent such legislation from passing while you identify the districts where you can register and bring enough Hispanic voters to the voting places in 2014.

Many Republicans moving to the right to avoid the challenges of the Tea Party in the primaries find this decision easier to make because they know that Hispanics don't show up in the midterms. If you are one of them and, paying attention to the Republican establishment, declare your support for immigration reform, you know that in the next midterms you're going to have a very unpleasant encounter with your Tea Party challenger so, in any case, you are better off trying to resist in the general elections siding with the xenophobic right. If you are Kim Propeack, you should be interested in making a statement by bringing to the voting places as many Hispanic voters as you could to show that Hispanics now also show up in the midterms. Unfortunately that's not the case.

Also, those Republicans would have to think twice about the general elections because it would make them a very little favor to win the primaries caving to the Tea Party if the Hispanic voting

trend in the mid terms grows up to the point of putting him at risk in the generals. What if before a more expanded electorate you could use his own words to brand him as the next Macaca candidate and have to organization to make that possible? So even if you don't support one of these candidates, that candidate will have to think twice before pushing too hard to right just to please the xenophobic Tea Party.

But what if you can't find any district where a significant Hispanic registration and GOTV could succeed? Then you have to be realistic and be prepared for a longer fight, one that extends itself until 2020. Fighting the way the traditional leaders have told you even though you know very well that that doesn't work is as idiotic as looking for a key where there's light instead of where you lost it and if you are so stupid, you should not be leading an effort on which the lives of 11 million people depend.

Failure is not the result of the passing of time or of a gypsy course. It is the result of the mediocrity of your acts.

2. Know your enemy

If you feel good thinking that the Republican Party will cave to immigration reform because they know that screwing up this bill will close the door of the White House for them in 2016, you should grow up, get better information or both.

Nothing better than the words of Boehner, a man came from the Republican establishment, killing the Senate bill to realize who is winning the internal struggle inside the Republican Party after the results of the 2012 elections. The Tea Party obviously prevailed and for the Tea Party winning the next general elections is not a priority. As far as they can keep their little feudal electoral kingdoms they will be fine in the belief that eventually their time will come. If you are, after all this, still directing your artillery to the Republican establishment, you should not be directing this effort.

Now, as we have seen, you can't persuade the congressmen in these districts with a nice choreography or even with an intelligent argument and not even their own constituents will be able to persuade them. To address this problem you need a plan similar to the one I proposed Francisco Acosta in 2012 (<http://www.dailykos.com/...>) though adapted to the present circumstances. You need the tripod (volunteers, fundraising, messaging) of which I have written before, just focused this time in registering and bringing to the voting places enough Hispanic voters in selected districts where you can make a difference. To make this possible, you have to bring volunteers from the states where you have plenty of support to work in the districts where you need them.

Also, learning from the experience of 2007, you need to improve your fundraising effort and part of that is to improve your image and messaging so the immigration issue is not radioactive in those districts anymore and the candidates are willing to take your money, what Immigrant's List couldn't do in 2008.

Also, learning again from the NumbersUSA experience of 2007, this effort has to be a coordinated effort. It might not be gigantic or even nationwide but, whatever it scale, and supported with good visibility, it has to synchronize efficiently the three legs of that tripod... if you really want to win.

If you're curious about Kim Propeack's Casa de Maryland's alternative to this tripod, it is the endorsement by Casa de Maryland to the hard-hearted candidates of those gerrymandered districts only if they make a change of heart and support immigration reform. Yes, you read it right. Even if you don't have money or an organization on the ground to back that endorsement, those congressmen who, in fear of the Tea Party have turned their backs to their principles and

even to their constituents, are going to change their hearts because Kim Propeack is going to endorse them.

3. Misery even in the messaging

I myself would be in favor of getting at least the Dream Act passed if there were no chances of passing comprehensive immigration reform in the long term but we're not at that point yet. Fighting for the Dream Act from the very beginning is stupid if you want immigration reform because the Dreamers are the most presentable face of immigration reform and taking them out of the picture would hurt immensely the chances of passing immigration reform afterwards. That's why Republicans favor a piecemeal approach. If you don't understand this, your messaging lacks coherence and you should not be playing with the lives of 11 million people sat on a chair that is obviously too big for you.

Unfortunately the left, and much less the so called pro-immigrant movement, doesn't have something like Heritage Action, that conveyor belt that is less worried about making serious research than it is on affecting policy. That conveyor belt is the point of origin of that messaging that should end in columns of opinion and editorials, the answers of your spokesmen when they're interviewed and, at the end, in the slogan of your grassroots. Unfortunately the good research of the Pew Hispanic Center and the Cato Institute remains buried in their Web pages while the dishonest pseudo-research of Heritage and the Center for Immigration Studies take roots, deepening the campaign of disinformation the xenophobic right has spread for decades.

When a few weeks ago the President, your main ally, declared publicly that illegal immigrants have to go to the 'back of the line' you know you are screwed because if you know the law, you will see that that 'line' doesn't exist. For example, due to the national origin quotas, an Austrian will come in months while you, if you are a Mexican, will have to wait years even if the two of you file their petition at the same time. In short, your place in that imaginary line depends not on the time when you file your petition but on your caste of birth. If you were born in the wrong country or family, sad day for you because you might find that there's not line for you or that, even if it exists, you will have to wait for 30 years or so while other people, born or assimilated by marriage to better castes of birth, will come legally in six months. If the myth of the line is repeated by nobody else but the President, your main ally, you should realize that your communications effort sucks and you should quit. Illegal immigrants are not so because of the excitement of the experience but because when they wanted to come legally there was no real or realistic line for them.

Precisely because our leaders didn't do that, the House Republicans find today so easy to use this cheap trick speaking now that an eventual 'path to citizenship' should not go through a 'special line' but though the 'regular process' knowing well that that line doesn't exist and that, that way, immigration reform would end up in the bizarre result of putting more teeth on enforcing the system of castes that is the current immigration system while kicking illegal immigrants back to the illegality from which they were trying to escape.

Another example of this misery was the '\$6.3 trillion cost of immigration reform' pseudo-paper of Heritage. As in the case of the 'line', Kim Propeack was not there to set the record straight debunking that pseudo paper and it had to be the Cato Institute which exposed that pack of lies for what it was. Still nobody has exposed the cheap trick that the House Republican's position about the legalization of illegal immigrants 'through the regular process' is.

4. What if you are not immigrant or Hispanic?

Well even in this case you should be interested in an effort like this. Hector Perez Garcia, maybe the last Hispanic leader to provide results for the Hispanic community, engaged in the campaigns of Kennedy and Johnson moved by a series of grievances about segregation in

schools, treatment of veterans, discrimination in the labor market, poll taxes, etc. Perez Garcia was successful moving a Mexican American community that before had been overwhelmed by the apathy and his success was rewarded by Johnson on the issues of his interest.

Now, no other community has been more devastatingly affected by the housing bubble and Hispanics, who had lost on average 40% of their accumulated wealth, should have been your main ally in the battle for financial reform. A large proportion of Hispanics are poor and so are much more affected by crappy public schools or by, in general, spending policies, and they should be the first ones interested in reforming the current education system. Also, they are as affected by gun violence and gangs as black communities and have declared in polls their concern for the effects of climate change but when you see the last study of the Pew Hispanic Center about Hispanic attitudes towards voting and you see the lame excuses with which they excused their absence from the voting places, you might conclude that Hispanics are not a reliable ally on those battles. Nevertheless, had you read about the case of Hector Perez Garcia, you would have had to conclude that it was not always that way and that it doesn't have to be like that. What you need is to sponsor leaders like Hector Perez Garcia, a leader who can provide results because he knows how the political system works and is more interested in results than in choreographies paying homage to his own vanity. If you don't do use the momentum created among the Hispanic community by this issue and don't do anything to organize intelligent and determined Hispanics who can develop this new brand of immigration activism, then don't complain about how unreliable Hispanics are as political allies because that apathy is in good part the result of their clownish leadership.