

THE LATIN TIMES

Pablo Pantoja, Former GOP Hispanic Outreach Head, Says He Will Register With Democratic Party; Why?

By David Iaconangelo, May 14, 2013 01:

Pablo Pantoja, the former head of Hispanic outreach with the Republican Party in Florida, says he will switch his party affiliation and register as a Democrat in an email circulated by members of the state's Democratic Party and published today in several Florida newspapers. Pantoja, who is of Puerto Rican descent and reportedly served as a National Guardsman in Iraq and Kuwait, cited "the culture of intolerance surrounding the Republican Party today" in his decision and said he was "taking a stand against it".

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Pantoja also made what appears to be a reference to the conservative think tank the Heritage Foundation, which recently released a study asserting that immigration reform would cost the United States \$6.3 trillion. One of the co-authors of the study was Jason Richwine, who was recently discovered to have written in a past dissertation "no one knows whether Hispanics will ever reach IQ parity with whites" - an assertion which Pantoja called "racist". Other conservative and libertarian think tanks such as the Cato Institute and Americans for Tax Reform have criticized the Heritage Foundation's study, while the American Action Forum released a study in April saying that an overhaul of immigration laws would reduce federal deficits by as much as \$2.5 trillion.

The Heritage Foundation has distanced itself from Richwine's IQ comment. But Pantoja says that other studies on immigration suffer from what he calls "eugenics-based innuendo".

"Although I was born an American citizen, I feel that my experience, and that of many from Puerto Rico, is intertwined with those who are referred to as illegal," wrote Pantoja in his email. "My grandfather served in an all-Puerto Rican segregated Army unit, the 65th Infantry Regiment. He then helped, along my grandmother, shatter glass ceilings for Puerto Rican women raising my aunt to become the first Puerto Rican woman astronomer with a PhD in astrophysics (an IQ of a genius as far as I'm concerned). Puerto Ricans, as many other Americans still today have to face issues of discrimination in voting and civil rights."

Pantoja also wrote that he would be making a "modest contribution" to the ACLU for their work in protecting the rights of immigrants.

The former head of Florida Hispanic outreach quit his post last August. He continues to work as a coordinator at the Libre Initiative, which describes itself as "an organization for economic freedom".