

RedState

The GOP Should Give Up On The Wall, Not On Outreach And Hispanic Voters

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On Sunday, Charlie Kirk, founder of the right-wing student organization Turning Point USA, sent a tweet that inadvertently represents the issues the Republican Party is facing.

If the GOP screws up immigration it will be the end of the Republican Party as we know it

Legalizing millions of democrat voters will put conservatives in a permanent political minority

Build the wall. End chain migration. Deport illegals in prisons. Defund sanctuary cities

There are several interesting points to note about this tweet.

First, “build the wall” is not as simple or as obvious as its advocates act like it is.

- A wall will be expensive — Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) estimated in 2015 a wall would cost anywhere from \$12 to \$15 billion, while a 2017 U.S. Department of Homeland Security internal report estimated as much as \$21.6 billion — and although Trump originally promised on the campaign trail that Mexico would pay for the wall, he has since backtracked and said American taxpayers will pay, which “will be paid back by Mexico later” “through reimbursement/other” methods.
- A wall will be ineffective, because most illegal immigration is no longer caused by people sneaking across the Mexican border but rather by people overstaying their visas.
- A wall will require eminent domain. Sixty-seven percent of the land along the United States border with Mexico is private or state-owned; in order to build a wall along the border, it will be necessary for the government to forcibly seize land and private property from private citizens — which is the opposite of the small and limited government principles that conservatives frequently espouse. Conservatives oppose big government because we recognize that the more power the state acquires, the more power it desires and the more able it is to abuse that power and grant itself even more.

This tweet also seems to assume that Republicans should just entirely desert any attempt at outreach or any effort to persuade people that conservative principles are better for them and for the country.

- There is no indication that it is possible to win over independents; to convert Democrats into Republicans; or to persuade new legal immigrants that free market, limited government principles are advantageous and better enable people to follow their dreams without finding the government standing in their way and making their path more difficult, time-consuming, or expensive.
- There is no effort to show people why big government is harmful or intrusive and should therefore be restrained from obtaining too much power.
- There is no recognition at all that the Republican Party cannot just count on existing Republican voters and that it cannot and will not survive if it doesn't win people over to its causes.

Lastly, the idea that Republicans cannot win over Hispanics (or other immigrants) completely ignores the states of Texas and Florida and their Hispanic populations. Texas is currently a Republican stronghold *and* has an Hispanic population last measured by the 2010 census at 40%, while Republican Donald Trump won Florida, which has a Hispanic population of 33%, in the 2016 presidential election.

Per Alex Nowrasteh at Cato Institute, it is a mistake for Republicans to assume they cannot attract and win over American voters of Hispanic origin:

According to a recent dissertation by Abramyan (2016), Hispanics are more conservative and moderate in most of their political opinions than their overwhelming self-identification as Democrats would predict.

Kirk's tweet seems simultaneously unfamiliar with the circumstances regarding California's evolution into a solidly Democrat state.

Every Republican presidential nominee in every presidential election from 1968 until 1988 received California's electoral votes, but no Republican presidential nominee has won the state since. A convincing argument exists that Proposition 187 of 1994 is the reason that California turned away from the Republican Party. Nowrasteh extensively examined Proposition 187's effect on California's political shift, and I will summarize him here.

Proposition 187 was a ballot initiative that proposed prohibiting any unlawful immigrants from using public services, including public education and non-emergency medical care, and called for law enforcement to investigate the immigration status of detainees.

At the time of the initiative, California's economy was struggling, and schools were overcrowded and underfunded. Proposition 187 pointed to illegal immigrants in the state as the reason for economic misfortune and hardships; Section 1 of the proposition stated that, among other woes, Californians had "suffered and are suffering economic hardships caused by the presence of illegal immigrants in this state." The initiative was also referred to as "Save Our State (SOS)."

Proposition 187 passed in November 1994 with 59% of the vote, although it was wildly unpopular among Hispanic Californians, and there is also evidence to support the possibility that helped to turn white voters in California off from the Republican Party.

A federal district court ultimately found the proposition unconstitutional, and in 1999 the newly elected California governor effectively killed the law.

According to Nowrasteh,

“The other theory is that Republican support for anti-immigrant ballot initiatives and candidates ruined the GOP brand in the eyes of immigrants, their children, and whites who were turned off by the nativist appeals – driving all of them into the arms of the Democrats who were pro-immigration.”

Nowrasteh compares California to Texas, where then-Governor George Bush and the Texas Republican Party actively courted Hispanics, sought their votes, and opposed proposals similar to Proposition 187.

Texas provides an excellent counter-example to California. In 2014, Hispanics made up 38.6 percent of the population of both states. From 1980 to 2012, the non-white population of both states grew at about the same rate and are very closely correlated (correlation of 0.99). Texas’s population was 55.7 percent non-white in 2012 while California’s was 60.8 percent. The big difference between them is how their respective state GOPs treated a growing minority population...

In 1994, the Texas Republican candidate George W. Bush ran on a pro-immigration platform that publicly eschewed the anti-immigration politics that Wilson championed. Bush received only 28 percent of the Hispanic vote in that year but Wilson’s Hispanic vote total collapsed to only 25 percent. In 1998, George W. Bush built on the inclusive, pro-immigrant language he used in his first campaign to earn 50 percent of the Hispanic vote while California Republican Dan Lungren inherited Wilson’s legacy and only earned 17 percent – practically the reverse of 1990.

Nowrasteh admits it is, of course, entirely possible that California was becoming a Democrat stronghold regardless and it is simply a coincidence that the political shift overlaps Proposition 187. However, as Nowrasteh points out, the timing does seem significant, especially because the opposite course was occurring nearly simultaneously in Texas under Governor Bush.

The Republican Party in California was diminished after Proposition 187 passed and the state party became associated with nativism. Republicans should work to prevent the same fate for the national Republican Party after 2016. The Republican Party should hear the warning bells sounding.