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Distinguished pol of the week

By: Jennifer Rubin – June 23, 2013

Failure is an orphan, they say, and success has many parents. In the case of immigration, a number of pro-reform conservatives have taken on the burden of pressing forward in spite of attacks from the right and left. Talk-show hosts such as Sean Hannity and Bill O'Reilly rose to the occasion. Outside groups including the Cato Institute, Americans for Tax Reform and the American Action Network took up the cause. Republican Sens. John McCain (Ariz.), Lindsey Graham (S.C.) and Jeff Flake (Ariz.) carried much of the burden.

But one figure stands out head and shoulders above the crowd. He took an enormous political risk, challenged stalwarts on his own side and personified principled deal-making. Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.) learned how to take a punch and keep on fighting. Without him, the Senate would not be on the cusp of a cloture vote and final votes on border security and the entire package. He didn't shy away from right-wing media and was able to make his case to those who have been vilifying the Gang of Eight. I don't recall a single instance in which he lost his temper, at least in public.

Before this effort, to be candid, I was skeptical about Rubio's toughness and legislative prowess. Sure, his life story was compelling and he is among the best orators on the right. But did he have more? Over the past few months and weeks, he's shown courage and stamina. He knew when to lead and when to let others carry the ball forward. He proved himself a force to be reckoned with and a top-tier contender for 2016.

In doing so, he may have shifted the center of gravity for the GOP and opened the way for a much-needed updating. He revealed that, for all their huffing and puffing, the anti-immigrant wing doesn't have a lock on the right.

So for all that (and to his staff that was disciplined, effective and unflappable throughout), we can say, well done, Senator.