



Lamar Smith: Immigration Reform's King of Denial

Restrictionist Republicans Remain Stuck in First Stage of Loss and Grief Despite their Losses in the 2008 Elections

By: Allen E. Kaye

Editor's Note: The recent signing of a controversial anti-immigration law by Arizona's Republican Governor Jan Brewer has brought focus once again on

America's illegal immigration problem.

Before and after Senate Bill 1070 became law on April 23rd, civil unrest punctuated by loud protests and several minor clashes took place at its state Capitol, where more than 1,500 people gathered to chant, pray and either praise or castigate the Republican governor.

Brewer, who faces a stiff primary challenge in the upcoming elections in November and needs conservatives to keep her in office, said the law represents a means for Arizona, which has a substantial Latino population, to "work to solve a crisis we did not create and the federal government has refused to fix - the crisis caused by illegal immigration and Arizona's porous border."

There are various sides to the issue of how to solve the problems caused by illegal immigration in the United States, made more urgent in the midst of an economic recession and scarcity of money. Most US governors have put their states in deep holes of debt despite increasing property taxes.

Allen Kaye discusses some political aspects of the Latino illegal immigration problem below.

In a letter to the editor in National Review, U.S. Rep. Lamar Smith (R-TX) attempts to refute conservative pundit Richard Nadler's recent essay about the need for the GOP to change its stance on immigration reform. But Smith's letter makes it clear that this policymaker--and his colleagues in the GOP who agree with him--is still stuck in the first stage of loss and grief following the November 2008 elections: denial and isolation.

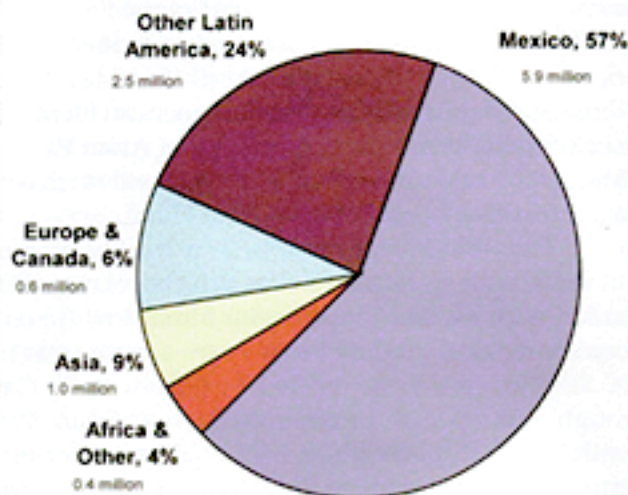
"Lamar Smith thinks that the Republicans' path back to power somehow involves calling for the deportation of millions of Latinos and other immigrants, including the family members, friends, and loved ones of the fastest-growing group of new voters in America," said Frank Sharry, Executive Director of America's Voice. "Treating immigrants like the enemy and blocking progress on comprehensive immigration reform shows that Rep. Smith is in denial when it comes to learning the lessons of this past November."

Smith's letter cherry-picks data from 25 years ago to assert that Latinos do not care about immigration reform and the 2008 Latino exodus from Republicans was not related to immigration.

However in a recent Pew Hispanic Center poll, 88 percent of Latinos called immigration an important issue, and Latino immigrant voters made the largest swing from Republican to Democrat of any demographic group in the 2008 cycle - a fact that can only be explained by their close attention to the immigration debate and their opposition to the Republican Party's handling of the immigration issue.

In 2004, Spanish-dominant Latino voters supported

National Origin of Illegal Immigrants: 2004



Source: Jeffrey Passel, Unauthorized Migrants: Numbers and Characteristics, Pew Hispanic Center, Washington, D.C., June 14, 2005.

Kerry narrowly over Bush 52-48%, but America's Voice found that in 2008, these voters went for Obama over McCain 75-25%.

Smith also claims that 2008 "congressional elections showed that amnesties and other open-borders proposals are still widely unpopular among voters." However, every independent survey of public opinion on the subject over the last several years has found the exact opposite.

And recent analysis by America's Voice's showed that in battleground House and Senate races, candidates supporting broader immigration reforms consistently beat out hard-line immigration politicians. In 20 of 22 competitive House and Senate races where immigration played a key role, the candidate favoring a more comprehensive approach on immigration defeated the hard-line opponent. Clearly, the American people are more interested in practical policies and real results than obstructionism and scapegoating.

Smith and Nadler's back and forth represents an ongoing battle in Republican circles over the issue of immigration. On one side are conservative strategists and thinkers, from Karl Rove to Grover Norquist, who are taking note of the political power of Latino voters and the GOP's tattered brand image due to its stance on immigration reform, and are pushing for change within the Party. On the other side are Lamar Smith and his allies, who led the charge against immigration-related provisions of SCHIP and attempted to sabotage the stimulus passage using the immigration bogeyman.

"We hope that Lamar Smith and his friends will quickly advance through the other four stages of grief and finally reach acceptance that the anti-immigration wedge issue simply doesn't work and doesn't reflect the wishes of the American people," said Sharry.