



<http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/sunday/commentary/la-op-tancredo1may01,1,4347651.story>

THINKING OUT LOUD / IMMIGRATION

This Land Is Whose Land?

The 'racist' slur won't muzzle the immigration debate, this Colorado congressman argues.

By Thomas G. Tancredo

Rep. Thomas G. Tancredo, a Republican, is in his fourth term of representing Colorado's 6th District and is chairman of the 78-member Congressional Immigration Reform Caucus.

May 1, 2005

People who say it's racist to want secure borders are insulting the intelligence of the American people, and such charges betray an empty arsenal of serious arguments. No wonder the immigration reform movement is gaining on every front.

Last November's election gave momentum to the movement in a way not widely reported in the media but very much understood by political analysts and lawmakers. President Bush increased his share of the Latino vote from about 32% to 40% in that election — without using the immigration issue. A New York Times analysis of the Bush-Cheney campaign ads aimed at Latinos revealed that the issues used to attract Latino voters were economic empowerment, educational opportunity and traditional moral values. Not a single Bush-Cheney campaign ad mentioned Bush's guest-worker proposal or liberalized immigration rules.

I predict that the immigration reform movement is about to score a monumental victory in Congress with the impending passage of "Real ID," a measure that will, among other things, set federal standards for driver's license documents and prohibit states from giving driver's licenses to anyone in this country illegally. The House passed these provisions in February, and Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) has indicated that he thinks Democrats in the Senate will accept them as part of the defense supplemental appropriations bill.

This victory for border security and immigration control has its roots in the 9/11 commission report, but political events since election day 2004 have also played a large role. The 9/11 commission recommended the denial of driver's licenses to illegal aliens and better security for driver's license documents. Those provisions were passed by the House by a wide margin in October. Then on Nov. 2, a political earthquake occurred when Arizona voters approved Proposition 200, which denies state welfare benefits to illegal aliens and strengthens voter registration requirements. Forty-seven percent of Latino voters and 59% of Latino Republicans voted for Proposition 200.

These figures have liberated Republicans to speak candidly about immigration control without fearing the "race card." Opponents will still try to use it, but it rings hollow. In the words of Lyndon

B. Johnson, "That dog won't hunt."

All of which means that Bush must have some other reason for continuing to push his ill-conceived proposal for amnesty for illegal aliens and for turning a blind eye to the dangers of open borders. He appears to be pandering not to Latino voters but to the government of Mexico. Is he so influenced by the corporate advocates for cheap labor that he cannot see the loss of millions of jobs by Latino and black Americans to the unfair competition of illegal labor?

There is now a broad consensus in Congress that border security must be given a high priority. We cannot think seriously about legalizing millions of new "temporary workers" until we are able to control our borders and know who is entering our country and who is leaving.

In 2004, there were more than 70,000 non-Mexicans caught trying to enter the U.S. — through Mexico! They came from Brazil, Syria, Pakistan, Indonesia, Iraq, China and 120 other countries, the Department of Homeland Security reports. What is wrong with the United States placing at least the same importance on border security as Mexico does in guarding its southern border with Guatemala and Belize? Mexico's love affair with open borders is selective; it applies only to the U.S. Does this selectivity have anything to do with the estimated \$16 billion sent home to Mexico last year by Mexican nationals living in the U.S.?

We can have genuine border security without jeopardizing legal trade and commerce with our neighbors. But there is some commerce we need to interrupt — the commerce in human smuggling, in drug smuggling and the export of criminal gangs to American cities. More than 10% of the inmates in U.S. jails and prisons are illegal aliens, and in California it is more than 20%. In 2002, 33.6% of criminals sentenced in federal district courts were noncitizens.

Last year in Los Angeles County, more than 30,000 criminal aliens who served jail sentences were released back into the community instead of being deported. What is the justification for this absurdity? Who will speak for the future victims of these criminals? Who dares call it racist to want these predators and 100,000 other criminal aliens at large across our nation sent home and kept away from our communities by secure borders?

Last month's Minuteman protest on the Arizona border is only a harbinger of what is to come if political leaders do not take notice of legitimate citizen outrage over these absurdities. Citizens are demanding two simple things — border security and immigration law enforcement. When did law enforcement become a radical idea?

*

The issue that hits us where we live

On April 17, under the heading Thinking Out Loud / Traffic, we splattered this section with a cluster of essays, an editorial and a quasi-board game. The idea, we said, is to spend a year or so publicly wrestling with the seemingly intractable problem of gridlock.

Our hope, we said, was that the exercise would help The Times' Opinion Manufacturing Division understand the issue and embrace solutions.

We also warned readers that we would soon give the same treatment to immigration. Let the wild rumpus begin.

If you want other stories on this topic, search the Archives at latimes.com/archives.

TMSReprints

Article licensing and reprint options

Copyright 2005 Los Angeles Times