

commentary

from other pens...

Hispanic growth draws more political attention

By Will Lester *Associated Press Writer*

WASHINGTON — The dramatic growth of the Hispanic population in the U. S. has riveted the attention of the political establishment.

Republicans say their policies on everything from education to immigration will lure new voters among the nation's fastest growing demographic group. Democrats counter that the GOP's historic stance on government spending, immigration laws and many social issues will limit how much progress the Republicans can make.

New figures on growth of the Hispanic population offered a reminder of the high stakes. The population of Mexican-Americans grew by 53 percent over the last decade.

President Bush celebrated Mexican independence at the White House and extended temporary refuge to thousands of Central Americans who came to this country after a hurricane. Democrats took out Spanish language television ads explaining why Bush policies were bad for Hispanics. Both parties started weekly radio addresses in Spanish.

"It's very nice both parties are paying respects to our culture," said Cecilia Munoz, a policy analyst at the National Council of La Raza, a Hispanic civil rights group. "But it's not enough, not even close."

"If the president is having mariachis at the White House and other members of his party are refusing to change ugly immigration laws, it's hard to communicate a new outlook to Hispanics," she said.

White House officials say there will be plenty of policies to appeal to Hispanics, from Bush's plans for education accountability to his interest in overhauling immigration policies and the Immigration and Naturalization Service. Republican Party chairman Jim Gilmore has launched efforts within the party to attract Hispanic support in communities and organize Hispanic leadership.

Republicans in Hispanic regions agree it will take significant steps beyond imagery and speeches in Spanish to win over Hispanics.

California state Assemblyman Abel Maldonado, a Republican from Santa Barbara, said Republicans "will have to get out there and talk to the community, get out to the barrios, tell them what our message is."

Congressional candidate Noel Irwin Hentschel, running in a June 5 special election in an ethnically diverse district in south Los Angeles, said: "We have to be there physically, be there to ... defend them so they're treated with dignity and respect."

Democrats were very conscious of immigrant issues in 1996. The Clinton administration aggressively pushed for citizenship for more than 1 million immigrants, a move it denied was political.

Clinton beat Republican Bob Dole by a wide margin among Hispanics in 1996 in an election that soon followed some Republican-sponsored measures that were tough on immigrants.

"The Republican Party lost its behind in key states because of the wedge-issue mentality," said Antonio Gonzalez, president of the William C. Velasquez Institute in San Antonio.

Bush got 35 percent of the Hispanic vote after a concentrated effort and was above 40 percent in his home state of Texas. Democrats are determined to keep GOP percentages from growing in future elections.

Maria Cardona, communications director for the Democratic National Committee, noted Bush got "the most Hispanic votes of any Republican since Ronald Reagan" and Democrats are responding. Hispanics currently identify with the Democratic Party at levels ranging from 60 percent to 80 percent in most states, though Hispanic support was evenly split in 2000 in Florida.

Rep. Silvestre Reyes, a Texas Democrat and chairman of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, said the focus on Hispanics, the Republicans' money advantage and concentrated strategy are clearly a threat. "I feel confident when Latinos look at the issues," he said, "they will see Democrats are better advocates for their positions and their interests."

EDITOR'S NOTE — Will Lester covers polling and politics for The Associated Press.



Echoes of the 1960s that can never go away

They are two people who buried pieces of their young lives and moved on to become productive, admirable people. One was a governor then senator, the other a chef, mother and church volunteer. But their new lives must have been something out of an Edgar Allan Poe story. No matter how deep they buried their pasts, a heartbeat thrummed faintly in their ears, as if from a faraway grave. At any moment, they knew, the old ghosts could rise.

And of course, they did. Kathleen Soliah went on trial yesterday in Los Angeles on charges that, as a member of the Symbionese Liberation Army, she planted nail-studded pipe bombs under two police cars in 1976. For most of her 23 years as a fugitive, she has been living as Sara Jane Olson, wife of an emergency room doctor and mother of three daughters in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Last week, Bob Kerrey, former governor and two-term senator, admitted that as a 25-year-old lieutenant in Vietnam he was responsible for killing women and children during a raid in 1969.

Both Soliah and Kerrey have lived exemplary lives in the several decades since the violent incidents that have landed them in the news this week. Both were young at the time. Neither is a threat to society now.

The question is: What good is served by dredging up the past and imposing consequences? Their cases beg the question: What should be the purpose



joan ryan

• commentary

of punishment? Is it to rehabilitate, to deter further crime or to make criminals pay a price? If it is to rehabilitate, both have done the job well on their own. If it is to deter further crimes, both are clear on that front, too.

Soliah clearly is no longer the radical, misguided young woman that police describe. Friends say it's a waste of taxpayer money to conduct a trial that is expected to last eight months, and it is especially a waste to put a good woman behind bars, taking a mother away from three daughters.

But what about paying a price for one's actions? If Soliah is given a get-out-of-jail-free pass, we send the message that all will be forgiven if you can successfully elude your captors for a sufficient number of years.

This is not justice. Justice is facing up to your actions, no matter how many years have passed. Justice is allowing a jury to sift through the evidence. Justice is making sure the police officers who were almost blown to bits are given a public accounting of the conspiracy to take their lives.

In the civilian life in which Soliah operated, the

rules were clear. In the Vietnam War, they were anything but.

Kerrey and other young men found themselves in a morally ambiguous, unwinnable war. So much of what our soldiers did there was both right and wrong, and no one has yet to define a clear line between the two.

The story told today is as confusing as it must have been that night in Vietnam. As Kerry and his men arrived at a group of four or five hooches, they reportedly were fired upon. Kerrey's team fired back. They were horrified to discover that the dead were all women and children.

Should he be prosecuted so, like the Los Angeles police officers, the families of those Vietnamese women and children can hold someone accountable? I can't imagine how. Who is qualified to give an accurate account of that night and who is qualified to judge the actions of soldiers who feared for their lives and, when in free-fire zones, were ordered to attack any "targets of opportunity," including people and villages?

Like haunting memories, justice can be a ghost, as ephemeral and difficult to define as a fog-shrouded night in the Mekong Delta. But it can also be a heartbeat, a concrete living thing, thrumming louder until someone hears.

Joan Ryan is a columnist for the San Francisco Chronicle. Send comments to her in care of this newspaper or send her e-mail at joanryan@sfgate.com.

If you're still alive, you still have opportunities

He sat in my office and talked about his recent business failure. "It didn't kill me, so it must have been a lesson I needed to learn," this young business-owner reasoned. I admired the young man's maturity.

His attitude inspired this column. What he said is a part of a good operating philosophy for life. If it doesn't kill you, you still have opportunities to change the final outcome.

Failure is not permanent. Setbacks are temporary. Knockdowns are not the same as knockouts. Only death is lasting.

So, if you're still alive, celebrate the day. If you still have your feet, stand up and run. If you can talk, thank God for another day and a new opportunity.

The river of life is never a smoothly flowing current. It offers many challenges. Many circumstances drag us down. Bad things happen to good people. I don't know why, but I know they do.

I'm learning that what happens to us is not as important as what we do about it. The circumstances we face aren't as critical as how we choose to react to them.

So here are some thoughts for you readers who are in a tough spot today. You may have been knocked flat and are wondering if life is worth getting back up for. It is.

What doesn't kill you...
•...is a lesson. However, the lesson is not always obvious. Ask, and keep asking these questions:



don taylor

• minding your own business

What can I learn from this setback? What can I do differently to profit from this adversity? What is God trying to teach me in this situation? Then look and listen for the answers. I believe we can learn more from sorrow than from joy, more from illness than from health, more from failure than from success - if we are actively looking for the lesson.

•...makes you stronger. Trials, adversities and misfortunes strengthen the inner man. President Abraham Lincoln suffered many setbacks in his life. He failed in business, lost his young sweetheart, had a nervous breakdown and was humiliated in losing numerous political elections.

Yet he tried once again and was elected President of the United States. His previous experience with adversity strengthened him. He was prepared to lead America through one of the most troubled and controversial times in its history.

•...makes you wiser. Benjamin Disraeli said, "There is no education without adversity." However, the wisdom is not automatic. Some people who suffer setbacks turn bitter and withdraw from life. Others experience even greater adversity and

yet they use the knowledge gained to grow and prosper.

What is the difference? We gain wisdom from experience only if we realize that what happens to us is not as important as what we choose to do about it. You are wiser if you decide to turn a setback into a positive learning experience.

•...makes you thankful. Cancer didn't kill me in 1997. However, it has made me more thankful for every one of the nearly 1400 days I've lived since I recovered. Everyday is a great day.

I'm thankful I have meaningful work to do, and that I feel like doing it. I'm thankful when we receive refreshing rains, and for the sun that always follows. I'm thankful for the bills that come every month, and that we can pay them all. I'm thankful for the winter season of rest, and for the springtime of renewal.

Yes, I still have setbacks, but I'm thankful for the lesson to be learned from them. Some days will always be better than others, but everyday is a great day and I'm thankful.

Don Taylor is the co-author of "Up Against the Wal-Mart's." You may write to him in care of "Minding Your Own Business," PO Box 67, Amarillo, TX 79105. Column sponsored by Goodland Area Chamber of Commerce Business Development Committee.

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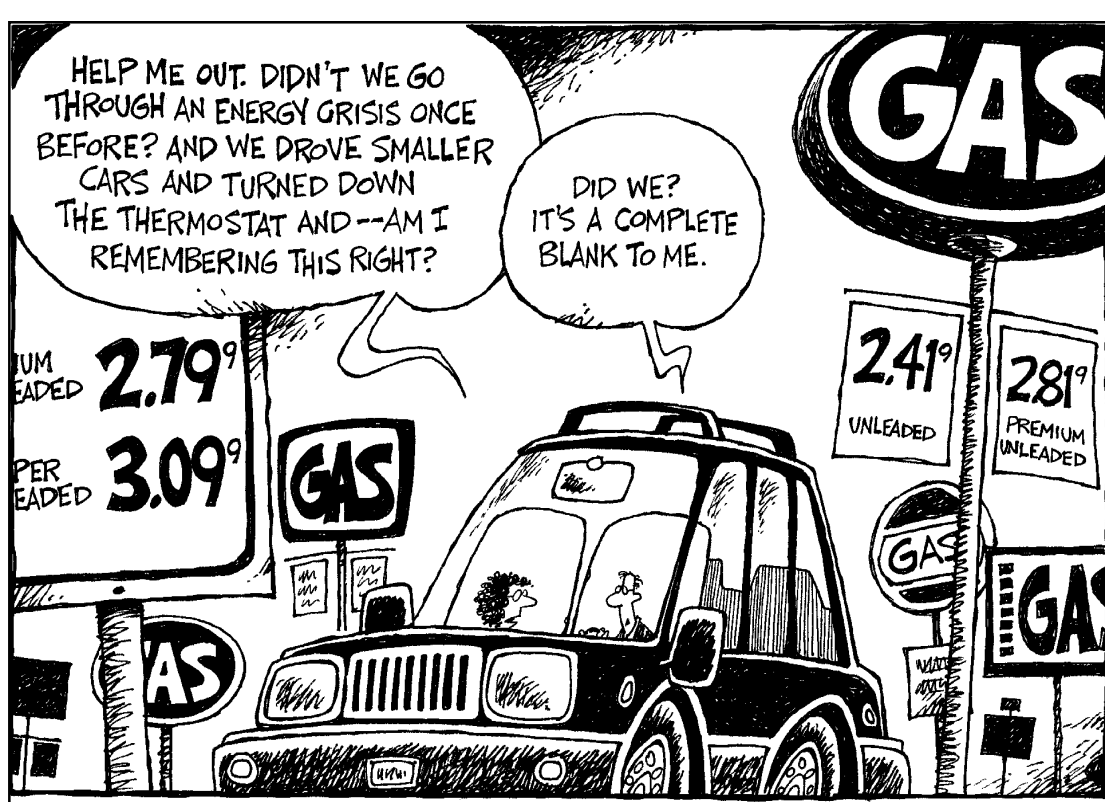
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