

# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

## WITH HISPANICS, REPUBLICANS TAKE A PATHWAY TO PERIL

By Jeff Horwitt  
February 1, 2015

In the aftermath of the 2012 election, the Republican Party undertook a self-assessment that found, among other things, that the GOP had a problem with Hispanics.

Mitt Romney received 27% of the Hispanic vote in 2012, according to exit polls. Faring that badly with a group whose share of the electorate in key battleground states continues to grow is a real problem. Many smart, thoughtful Republicans noted the need for change, and the GOP autopsy observed: "We have become expert in how to provide ideological reinforcement to like-minded people, but devastatingly we have lost the ability to be persuasive with, or welcoming to, those who do not agree with us on every issue."

Fast-forward to last weekend's "Iowa Freedom Summit." Just days after our country paid tribute to Dr. Martin Luther King and his dream of a tolerant society, Republicans paid tribute to another King with a far different vision. Rep. Steve King (R., Iowa) has a long history of making anti-immigrant remarks (see: [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)). The GOP tribute to Steve King does not speak well for Republicans' prospects in 2016.

House Speaker John Boehner (R., Ohio) deserves credit for condemning Rep. King's language: "There's no place in this debate for hateful or ignorant comments from elected officials ... [the comments are] deeply offensive and wrong. What he said does not represent the values of the American people or the Republican Party ... they make it harder to get anything done."

Unfortunately, no potential candidate for the Republican nomination has condemned Mr. King's remarks so clearly and decisively, if at all. And this includes the "great silent moderate minority" of GOP contenders who stayed away from the King event: Jeb Bush, Marco Rubio, Rand Paul, and Mitt Romney (who said Friday that he won't run).

The rest of the Republican field, however, did go to Iowa to curry favor with their King. Even New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, who prides himself on being blunt and who says he is willing to take on controversial issues, didn't stand up to the congressman from Iowa. It should be noted that in New Jersey, Gov. Christie signed into law a bill that grants undocumented students in-state tuition at New Jersey state colleges and universities. Any reference to this was missing from Mr. Christie's remarks last weekend. Instead, Mr. Christie, as well as John Bolton, Ben Carson, Ted Cruz, Carly Fiorina, Jim Gilmore, Newt Gingrich, Mike Huckabee, Rick Perry, Rick Santorum, Donald Trump, and Scott Walker, among others, showed up and praised Mr. King.

The 2012 GOP post-mortem was blunt: "Many minorities wrongly think that Republicans do not like them or want them in the country." And what is a Hispanic immigrant to think when most Republican presidential hopefuls embrace Steve King? Here's a collection of quotes from the event, courtesy of C-SPAN.

Donald Trump, speaking of immigrants crossing the border from Mexico, said: "Half of these people are criminals."

Ben Carson said of the next president: "I think they should make it their goal to seal the border within one year."

Only former Texas Gov. Rick Perry seemed to stumble upon the kinder and gentler talking points the GOP's post-mortem suggested when he described the children crossing the border without parents as "human beings made in the image of God." (His compassionate conservative terms called to mind President George W. Bush, who received 44% of the Hispanic vote in 2004.) But in his remarks, Mr. Perry also tossed red meat to the crowd: "Secure the border now, override this president's lawless executive order, restore, law and order, stand up to this face of evil and protect our citizens."

Findings from the January Wall Street Journal-NBC News poll suggest that Republicans have learned little from their own report.

- 73% of Hispanics approve of President Barack Obama's executive action on immigration.
- By a 2-to-1 margin, Hispanics have positive feelings toward the Democratic Party: 42% positive, 21% negative.
- By nearly 4 to 1, Hispanics are more negative than positive in rating the Republican Party: 13% positive, 46% negative.
- Even Republicans who steered clear of Steve King's event are viewed negatively by Hispanics: Mr. Romney's ratings are 22% positive and 40% negative, Jeb Bush is 15% positive and 33% negative, while likely Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton enjoys a 60% positive rating and only 17% negative.

In their report, Republicans noted: "We need to campaign among Hispanic, black, Asian, and gay Americans and demonstrate we care about them, too... But it is not just tone that counts. Policy always matters."

Well, in both tone and policy, possible Republican presidential candidates for 2016 either have not read the report or have chosen to ignore it. And unlike financial warnings, in which past performance does not necessarily predict future results, if Republican presidential candidates continue to embrace Steve King instead of Martin Luther King, past performance will be very predictive of future results with Hispanic voters.

*Jeff Horwitt is a vice president at Hart Research Associates and is part of the polling team for the WSJ/NBC Poll. He is on Twitter: @jeffhorwitt.*