

GOP LAWMAKERS RIP OBAMA'S IMMIGRATION POLICIES

By Keith Johnson

October 26, 2011

Another day, another grilling for Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano, with House Republicans targeting the administration's efforts to tackle illegal immigration.

In a rambunctious and wide-ranging oversight hearing before the House Judiciary Committee, Ms. Napolitano was raked over the coals by Republicans for the Obama administration's decision to prioritize the deportation of criminal aliens; the security of the southwestern border; Homeland Security's role in the "Fast and Furious" gun-running operation; and, just for a change of pace, the background of counter-extremism advisers to the department.

Ms. Napolitano echoed recent remarks, saying the administration's stance on illegal immigration is pilloried by the left as too harsh and by the right as too lenient. "Both these views are incorrect," she said, asking for a "facts-based" dialogue on immigration, which is quickly becoming a hot-button issue in the GOP presidential primary fight and, most likely, for next year's general election.

Rep. Lamar Smith, a Texas Republican and chairman of the committee, fired a shot across her bow even before the hearing began, with an op-ed in Politico calling the administration's deportation numbers a "trick," thanks to doctored statistics.

"Fourteen million Americans are now looking for work. Meanwhile, 7 million illegal immigrants have jobs in the U.S. We could free up millions of those jobs for citizens and legal immigrants if we simply enforced our immigration laws," he wrote.

What kind of jobs would those be? According to federal labor statistics, carpet mills, garment cutting and sewing, landscaping, car washes, and laundries are among the sectors most dominated by Hispanic workers (the numbers don't break out documented versus undocumented workers). What kind of jobs wouldn't they be? Professional careers such as management, law, architecture and the like: Among foreign-born workers, Hispanics have the lowest participation rates in professional sectors.

Ms. Napolitano reiterated the administration's record-setting level of deportations, with a nearly two-fold increase in deportations of criminal aliens since 2008, and the need for the Department of Homeland Security to focus its limited deportation budget on the worst offenders.

Republicans including Reps. Louie Gohmert and Ted Poe of Texas, and Jason Chaffetz of Utah didn't want to waste much of their allotted time allowing Ms. Napolitano to answer questions; Mr. Gohmert in particular said he wasn't going to be "filibustered" by letting a cabinet secretary answer questions in an oversight hearing.

In the end, Republicans seem to have found a way to link public concern over illegal immigration and over jobs—two crucial issues that will likely play a key role in the 2012 elections.

Despite the onslaught, Ms. Napolitano appeared more exasperated than beleaguered.

“Much of the ‘information’ about the border isn’t quite accurate,” she said, complete with air quotes.