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Obama & Immigration Reform

by Michael Sean Winters

Distinctly Catholic

The President is heading to El Paso to renew an effort to pass comprehensive immigration reform. As Politico points out, however, his effort is meeting with skepticism from Hispanic leaders. They are right to be skeptical.

It was shocking to see President Obama push so hard to push the repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell through the lame duck Congress while there was no such effort to pass comprehensive immigration reform. And, it is not difficult to understand his motives: Gays have become key to his fundraising efforts.

But, the President's push is not mere cynicism. We can hope that he will be re-engaging this issue now to make it a centerpiece of his re-election effort. Certainly, defending Medicare is going to be a central plank for Obama and the Dems in 2012. Making immigration reform an issue now will help to guarantee that, if he wins, he can claim a mandate to move on the issue if he wins re-election.

In 2008, Obama could run on "change" and "hope" but as an incumbent, he needs a more precise, less gauzy campaign rationale. Immigration reform may not have a prayer of passing now, but if he wins in 2012, having made it a central theme of his campaign, he might be able to get something done in 2013.

In the meantime, Hispanic leaders are right to insist that the President slow down the alarming deportation rate. President Obama need not ignore the deportation laws, but his administration does not need to be so aggressive in enforcing them either.

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