

McCain courts Hispanic voters

Contributed by Administrator
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from CNN:

Sen. John McCain said Monday the tenor of the immigration debate has hurt the way Hispanic voters view the Republican Party.

"I believe the majority of Hispanics share our view that the border must be secured, and the border must be secured first," McCain said in Phoenix, Arizona.

"But they also want us to have an attitude which I think most Americans do, that these are God's children and they must be taken care of."

The senator from Arizona used Cinco de Mayo as a launching pad for a new Spanish-language Web site on Monday, and he emphasized his stance on immigration and border security as he tried to court the Hispanic vote. Republican strategists have said McCain has to do well with Hispanic voters to win in November. When President Bush was re-elected in 2004, he received 44 percent of the Hispanic vote, but that was before the divisive political debate erupted over illegal immigration. VideoWatch McCain give his message to Hispanic voters »

McCain is seen as a moderate Republican when it comes to immigration reform, but the conservative base of his party has taken a hard-line approach on the issue. See where the candidates stand on immigration

In 2005, McCain angered some in his party when he and Democratic Sen. Ted Kennedy unsuccessfully pushed for a comprehensive immigration reform bill that included a path to citizenship.

McCain now says he would focus first on securing the borders before offering other ways to deal with illegal immigration.

McCain on Monday empathized with Hispanics who have been mistreated and said low-income Hispanics are often the first to lose their jobs when someone come to the United States illegally.

He underscored his view that those who came to the U.S. legally take priority over those who entered the country illegally, but said that still means the issue can be addressed "in a humane and compassionate fashion, understanding families, understanding all the aspects that affect the lives of all human beings."

McCain, who represents a border state with a large Latino population, said he thinks he will do well among Hispanic voters, partly because of his "long record working with Hispanic leadership."

"I know the people, I know the patriotism, I know the loyalty, I know the respect for the family, the advocacy for life," he said. "Everything about our Hispanic voters is tailor made to the Republican message." VideoWatch a report on McCain's outreach and record with Hispanics »

McCain also pledged to attend the National Council for La Raza's convention in July, the largest national Hispanic civil rights organization which seeks to improve opportunities for Hispanic-Americans.

Asked if he would face criticism from his more conservative backers, McCain stressed his party is all encompassing.

"My party is an inclusive party, my party reaches out to every citizen, every American who shares our views and our optimism and our belief in the principles of this great nation," he said.

"I will make sure we go to places where I may not get the majority of their votes. But the job I have is to reunite America, to make sure that people know that I will be the president of all the people whether they vote for me or not."

CNN's Dana Bash and Emily Sherman contributed to this report.