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GUEST OPINION

Republicans bullied by base

BY ROGER E. HERNANDEZ

It has been more than a month since the first U.S. presidential debate was held in Spanish. So far the republic survives, to the surprise of Republicans.

Just kidding. Besides, it is an exaggeration to say the debate was in Spanish. Univision's anchors asked questions in Spanish, candidates responded in English, then Univision aired voice-over translation; anyone who did not know Spanish could have followed the endless Democratic platitudes with closed-captioning.

And anyway, with the possible exception of Tom Tancredo, none of the GOP candidates is dumb enough to actually think this country is so weak that it will be brought down by a general excess of Spanish speaking.

Then why did every Republican except John McCain turn down the chance to take part in the Spanish debate, leaving the field to Democrats only?

What Republican candidates fear is the likes of "Stuart Jackson" running off his mouth. Stuart Jackson is the name that appears as author of thousands of postings on Google Groups alone, ranting about ...

well, let us let Stu speak for himself.

About Mitt Romney, for running Spanish-language outreach: "He's a wetback lover ... Ads in Spanish are for wetbacks only."

About the former mayor of New York: "Giuliani LOVES illegal aliens. He kisses their (expletive) because their cheap labor makes his business buddies rich."

About the senator from Arizona: "McCain is an open borders whore. I wish he had been killed by the NVA."

Why am I giving this jerk a national platform? Because there are many jerks like him in the Republican base, making GOP politicians tremble.

Back in 1996, during the wave of xenophobia that preceded the current one, Giuliani spoke before Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. "No one should break the law, [but] illegal and undocumented immigrants are going to remain, and even increase," he said. "And nothing that is now being proposed in Washington would realistically change that very much."

Too bad that 11 years later, the Stuart Jacksons of the Republican world bullied tough New Yorker Giuliani into opposing

the comprehensive immigration-reform bill that would have secured the border while recognizing the reality that, as he put it, "illegal and undocumented immigrants are going to remain."

But let nobody pretend this is about illegal immigration. Even Democrats at the Univision debate failed to give a straight answer when asked why nobody is saying much about securing the Canadian border, from whence terrorists could just as easily slip in. Certainly, people like Stuart have stopped pretending the issue is illegal immigration. They have let loose a wave of anger against all Hispanics, whether they are undocumented, have a green card or are fifth-generation Americans.

Which Republican candidate is willing to stand up and repeat what Giuliani told the Kennedy School back then, "I believe the anti-immigration movement in America is one of our most serious public problems"? McCain, probably. Anybody else? ■

— Roger Hernandez is a syndicated columnist and writer-in-residence at New Jersey Institute of Technology.

Hillarycare 2.0

BY RICH LOWRY

When it comes to health care, Hillary Clinton is never going to let her name be associated with the words "radical overhaul" ever again. Or, if she can help it, with massive bureaucracy or new taxes. That's what happened in 1993 with her health-care plan as first lady, and, as she never tires of saying, she has "the scars to prove it."

HillaryCare 2.0 is an entirely different enterprise, or so she would have us believe. It's the "American Health Choices Plan." It "builds on the current system to give businesses and their employers greater choice of health plans," while imposing "no overall increase in health spending or taxes." It's the all-things-to-all-people, sweetness-and-light, all-benefits-and-no-costs health-care plan of 2007.

For a liberal seeking to expand government-run health care, it's not necessary to create new, elaborate governmental mechanisms that are vulnerable to parody and frightening to voters. Simply building on the status quo is enough to hasten us toward national health insurance.

That's because we have a hybrid system of private insurance and government

health care that is increasingly tilting toward government. As the conservative writer Ramesh Ponnuru points out, the government already pays almost half of health-care costs. Liberals need only push this system toward its logical conclusion.

Because the private health-insurance market doesn't function properly, the government is left to pick up the pieces. But it is government policies that distort the health-insurance market in the first place. Ideally, people would pay for their own health insurance, the way they do with, say, auto insurance. But the tax code favors insurance that people get through their employers.

This creates an expensive system that's anxiety-inducing for people who worry about losing their insurance. The way the system is set up makes it difficult and expensive for individuals to buy insurance, which is one reason why 47 million Americans are uninsured.

Clinton's plan would make this ramshackle system worse. She proposes more regulations on insurers and a mandate on large employers to provide insurance coverage or pay a tax. The regulations will make insurance even more expensive, while the employer mandate would only

augment the current senseless system of people getting insurance through their jobs.

This means that the private-insurance market would, in all likelihood, continue to break down. And, of course, government will be there to keep increasing its market share. As Michael Cannon of the Cato Institute points out, Clinton proposes widening the availability of every government health-care program at hand -- Medicare would be extended to the nonelderly; the S-Chip program for poor children would be extended to the middle class; and the Federal Employees Health Benefits Plan would be extended to all. And all without the taint of a "radical overhaul."

Lately, Republicans like President Bush and Rudy Giuliani have gotten into the game, offering forward-looking ideas to try to create a health-care market where individuals can buy their own insurance. That would be the best health-care reform, but HillaryCare 2.0 looms, more cautious and therefore more plausible than her first act. ■

— Rich Lowry is editor of the National Review.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Okeechobee dilemma

A recent guest commentary by Rae Ann Wessell ("Water board right to stop failed policy," FW Sept. 27) proves that we are continuing to look at Lake Okeechobee's environmental problems through a political microscope, instead of a scientific one.

We should be troubled by the South Florida Water Management District's decision to not pump water south of Lake Okeechobee into the lake. This politically-motivated decision leaves the lake at a drastically low level. It leaves us without a real solution to the current drought conditions. And it keeps clean water from being put back in the lake.

People should not ignore the fact that the farmers in the south are cleaning their water. They are working to meet their phosphorous goals, yet there continues to be a blatant disregard for the phosphorous target from east, west and north of the lake. That's not rhetoric. That's fact.

I am in agreement that we need to clean up our estuaries. But we need to look in our own backyards. If we really want to do what's right, it's time we demand everyone start working toward a 40 ppb (parts per billion) phosphorous goal for Lake Okeechobee, and we need to start with the north. There's a huge cleanup program under way in the north, and we need to give the program time to work.

I agree with one statement Ms. Wessell made. She said, "every system — natural and manmade — has operating limits. If we are to make a commitment to and investment in restoration, we must begin with the limits of the natural system and not make public policy decisions based on political compromises." She is exactly right. Decisions regarding the cleanup of Lake Okeechobee should be based on science. The science says the problems afflicting the lake, in fact, start north of the lake. That's where our focus should be.

Judy Sanchez, Director of Corporate Communications U.S. Sugar, Clewiston ■