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EDITORIAL

Will primaries stop immigrant bashing?

BY ROGER E. HERNANDEZ

Has the air gone out of the anti-immigrant windbags? There is evidence the past month that yes, maybe.

The loudest immigrant-basher, Tom Tancredo, dropped out of the race. The noisiest huffer and puffer among candidates with a realistic shot, Mitt Romney, learned that peddling fear of immigrants didn't help him break out of the middle of the pack in Iowa and New Hampshire, and was not much of a factor in his win in Michigan.

And the only Republican who has not used immigration as a wedge issue, John McCain, won in New Hampshire. He won after being all but Officially Pronounced Dead last summer, when he refused to scurry toward Tancredoness with most of the rest of his party (it must be said, in all fairness, that another notable non-scurrier, for everything else he has done to make the world a worse place to live, is George W. Bush).

Meanwhile, over at the Dems, candidates have been so busy debating whether it is harder to run as a black man than as

a woman that they have yet to discover what a "Hispanic" is, beyond the ritual taco munch on the campaign trail.

Up next: Florida Jan. 29, and "Super Duper" Tuesday Feb. 5.

In Florida, the Neanderthal wing of the Republican Party has not gone extinct. But Florida's is the first primary in which the Hispanic vote matters.

Most Florida Hispanics are as aware as anybody else in the country that some of the Republican candidates — OK, all of the Republican candidates, except McCain — have been unable to restrain themselves from bad-mouthing immigrants, even as they insist that the problem is with illegal immigrants only. Even Giuliani, an unabashed admirer of immigrants while mayor of New York, has not resisted the temptation to stick in a quick kick.

Older Cuban immigrants — my dad's generation, those who came to the United States as adults to escape Castro's gulag — have different priorities. Their No. 1 issue remains American policy toward Cuba. But once that litmus test is passed (Mike Huckabee is the Republican least trusted on Castro), other issues count also. And

nobody, not even the most hypersensitive, politically correct left-wing Chicano activist from East L.A., is touchier about linguistic and ethnic attacks than these traditional, very conservative retired Cubans.

Put it like this: In a general election between a Republican anti-Castro hardliner who is not friendly to Spanish-speakers, and a soft-on-Castro Democrat who just loves Hispanics, older Cuban voters will either stay home or grudgingly vote for the Republican (see Dole-Clinton, 1996). But in a Republican primary in which every candidate competes to have the hardest anti-Castro line, the attitude toward Spanish and immigration may well be the tie-breaker.

Will Republicans stop pandering to the xenophobic right in Florida? How will they handle immigration in California, Colorado, New Jersey and New York, all of which have significant Hispanic populations, and all of which have primaries on Super Tuesday? ■

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

OPINION

Pennies from heaven

BY RICH LOWRY

The housing market is caught in a downward spiral that might last the rest of this year, and banks are struggling under a staggering burden of bad loans that has created a severe credit crunch. Don't fear, though, a \$250 check might be making its way toward your mailbox.

That's the economic "stimulus" that Democrats are coalescing around to forestall a recession. Barack Obama wants a \$250 tax rebate and a payment of \$250 to Social Security beneficiaries. If that doesn't work, he has a Plan B: sending out another \$250 check. Hillary Clinton wants to try \$70 billion in new government spending first; then, if the new tide of red ink fails, blanket the country with \$40 billion worth of rebate checks.

With the White House considering its own rebate proposal, some such scheme is likely to emerge as the lowest common denominator of sophomore economic policy for both parties.

A \$250 check is the equivalent of winning a tiny jackpot on a convenience-store

lottery ticket. It's not going to spur any lifestyle changes or fund any major purchases. This is why the history of the tax rebates — including the last time it was tried in 2001 — is a sorry one.

Most people aren't stupid enough to think a \$250 check improves their economic standing. This is keeping with the late economist Milton Friedman's "permanent income hypothesis," which said that people don't change their spending habits based on small blips in their income. In short: You can't fool people into thinking that they are richer than they really are.

So it is that research shows that most of the 2001 tax rebates were used to pay down debt or were saved. According to a study by University of Michigan economists, only about 20 percent was spent — a tiny stimulus at best.

It is the curse of capitalism that it suffers boom-and-bust cycles. In recent economic history, we've had the savings-and-loan bubble, the tech bubble and now the housing bubble. The lesson of all of them is that if it's too good to be true, it is. The blessing of capitalism is that — often brutally — it

adjusts and re-establishes its equilibrium. If too many houses have been built, the only way to stop it is if their price goes down — exactly what's happening now.

For the most part, government can't game the economy through clever temporary fixes. The key dishonesty in any stimulus debate is found in the phrase "jump-start," suggesting it's within the power of government to quickly and precisely influence the course of a \$13 trillion economy. The Clinton campaign promises not just to "jump-start" the economy, but to "jump-start green-collar jobs." Talk about a fairy tale.

Clinton is embracing the kind of massive stimulative public spending that her husband proposed in his 1992 campaign, before abandoning it as fiscally imprudent upon taking office. It turned out that the recession of the early 1990s was over even while Clinton was campaigning against it. That's the way it usually works — the market moves faster than politicians.

By the time you get your rebate check, the chances are a recession will already be upon us, or the threat will already have passed. Enjoy the extra couple hundred bucks. ■

— Rich Lowry is editor of the National Review.

MOMENTS IN TIME

- On Jan. 31, 1923, novelist Norman Mailer is born in Long Branch, N.J. In 1948 he wrote his first novel, "The Naked and the Dead," based on his own experiences in the Army during World War II. The book became a popular and critical success.

- On Feb. 1, 1884, the first portion of the Oxford English Dictionary is published. Today, at a whopping 20 volumes weighing more than 137 pounds, it would reportedly take one person 120 years to type all 59 million words in the OED.

- On Feb. 2, 1980, details of ABSCAM, an FBI operation to uncover political corruption in the government, are released to the public. Thirty-one public officials were targeted for investigation. In the opera-

tion, FBI agents posed as representatives of Abdul Enterprises, Ltd., a fictional business owned by an Arab sheik.

- On Feb. 3, 1948, the first Cadillac with tail fins was produced, signaling the dawn of the tail fin era. General Motors increased the size of the Cadillac's "tail feathers" every year throughout the 1950s. In 1959, the model's sales slumped dramatically, sounding the death knell for the tail fin.

- On Feb. 4, 1941, the United Service Organization is founded to offer support for U.S. service members and their families. The USO sent many actors, musicians and other performers to entertain the troops. Comedian Bob Hope made

annual trips to entertain overseas troops from World War II through Desert Storm in 1991.

- On Feb. 5, 1994, Byron de la Beckwith is convicted of the assassination of civil-rights leader Medger Evers 31 years earlier in Jackson, Miss. Beckwith, widely recognized as the killer, was prosecuted for murder in 1964. However, two all-white juries deadlocked and refused to convict.

- On Feb. 6, 1952, King George VI of Great Britain and Northern Ireland dies at the royal estate at Sandringham. Princess Elizabeth, the oldest of the king's two daughters, was crowned Queen Elizabeth II on June 2, 1953, at age 27. ■