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Immigration Myopia in Virginia

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For Virginia's Democrats to cede the issue of illegal immigration to Republicans in this fall's legislative contests would be as socially irresponsible as it would be politically myopic ["Democratic Gains Are Predicted in Va. Assembly," front page, Sept. 2]. Communities as diverse as Culpeper and Herndon, and Loudoun and Prince William counties, are seeking to curb the influx of illegal aliens (calling them "undocumented workers" is akin to referring to bank robbers as "unofficial withdrawal specialists").

Although they are denigrated as "xenophobes," "racists" and "nativists" by special pleaders, local leaders are responding to concerns about school crowding, emergency-room access, neighborhoods blighted by old vehicles, trash-strewn yards, houses bulging with occupants, ubiquitous signs in Spanish and the proliferation of gangs. Several other factors should awaken Democrats, especially those from Northern Virginia, who blithely intone the mantra that "we are a nation of immigrants":

? Periodic wars and depressions interrupted the waves of new arrivals in the 19th and 20th centuries, giving them a chance to assimilate and, above all, learn English. No such "timeouts" have occurred since the 1965 immigration law, which fostered the continuous influx of millions of Hispanics, many of whom live in linguistic enclaves perpetuated by the English-as-a-second-language lobby.

? Democrats claim to embrace the principle of justice. Although the United States legally admits almost 1 million prospective citizens each year, illegal aliens have broken the line, thrusting themselves ahead of men and women who have filled out myriad forms and followed the rules and expected to receive fair play in return.

? The Democrats should align themselves with the working people whom the Bush administration has disdained. It's not a Fairfax County lawyer or a Richmond businessperson whose wages and job opportunities are threatened by the mushrooming number of unlawful aliens. Instead, it's housekeepers, construction workers, hospitality industry employees and child-care providers, who feel abandoned when the party of Truman, Kennedy and Roosevelt elevates the interests of lawbreakers over the well-being of these forgotten blue- and pink-collar citizens.

? Finally, in scorning rigorous law enforcement, Democrats are compromising opportunities for African Americans, who have been our party's most faithful backers in the Old Dominion. The Congressional Black Caucus, which rakes in donations from corporate giants that exploit illegal aliens, has urged African Americans to join forces with Hispanics and other minorities in a "rainbow coalition" that supposedly will uplift the nation's downtrodden. In fact, such vapid sloganeering means that "African Americans have been left devoid of a strong black voice in Congress on a topic [illegal immigration] that affects them deeply, given their high unemployment rates and historic struggle to get quality housing, health care, education and other goods and services," writes Vanderbilt University professor Carol Swain, who happens to be black. Virginia's Democrats risk displaying equal callousness toward this constituency.

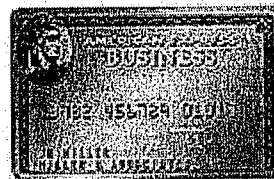
-- **George W. Grayson**

Williamsburg

The writer, who teaches at the College of William and Mary, served 27 years as a Democratic member of the Virginia House of Delegates.

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