

Tapping into racism at border?

Analyst cites tactics
of Duke, Buchanan

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WASHINGTON — Republican mavericks Patrick Buchanan and David Duke argue that protecting jobs is the just cause for erecting fences and deploying troops along the U.S.-Mexico border to stem illegal immigration.

But going into this week's pivotal Super Tuesday primaries in Texas and 10 other states, GOP pollster David Hill contends another force is motivating the renegade presidential candidates — the desire to tap into "latent racism" among voters.

Referring to Buchanan's proposal to run fences along 200 miles of the border, Hill said, "It sounds like a 200-mile-long Willie Horton to me." At the present time, there are fences along only small stretches of the 1,933-mile border between the nations.

The Rio Grande River provides a natural barrier along

Please see **BORDER, A-26**

What's
your
opinion
on the
border issue? / **A-26**



BORDER: Some say candidates trying to tap into latent racism

From A-1

much of the border.

Playing the race card is unlikely to help Buchanan or Duke much against President Bush's solid organization in Texas and other Southern states, but Hill said it could cause problems down the road for the incumbent.

Democrats without hesitation will suggest that Bush, who has not yet made immigration a campaign issue, is in sync with the extreme views of Buchanan and Duke, the Woodlands-based pollster said.

"It's disappointing that President Bush will be left holding the bag on this long after Duke and Buchanan are gone," Hill said.

Maria Jimenez, who helps monitor immigration for the American Friends Service Committee, agreed that Buchanan and Duke are trying to conjure up images of "the brown scare, the brown invasion" from south of the border.

Although the United States' economic woes are attributable to massive debt, loss of industry and a long list of other problems, Buchanan and Duke are trying to make illegal immigrants the scapegoats for the lingering recession and high unemployment, Jimenez said.

"That's definitely the objective — to play on people's fears," she said.

But on the campaign trail, Buchanan makes immigration part of his "America First" thrust, saying, "The United States is responsible for controlling its borders, and we're not responsible for the Mexican economy."

Buchanan, who also wants to dig ditches along parts of the border to help keep out illegal immigrants, said that since the United States did a fine job sealing the borders of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait during the Persian Gulf War, it should be able to handle its own border security more effectively.

Duke, a former Ku Klux Klan leader from Louisiana, has made similar remarks, declaring recently in Texas that illegal immigration is "threatening many of the ways of life that we have in this country."

Both Duke and Buchanan have made repeated references to preserving the nation's "Western heritage."

It was in that context that Buchanan made his most notorious remarks. "I think God made all people good, but if we had to take a million immigrants in — say Zulus next year or Englishmen — and put them in Virginia, what group would cause less problems for the people of Virginia?" he asked on an installment of ABC's *This Week with David Brinkley* last year.

That comment put Buchanan out of bounds in the opinion of Rep. Lamar Smith, R-San Antonio, who has led numerous fights in Congress to strengthen immigration laws.

"I think illegal immigration is a legitimate issue. Where I think

some candidates go too far is when they say immigrants should be of one color," Smith said.

Even though Buchanan and Duke have clouded the picture and the Democrats are laying in wait, Smith said he believes Bush should talk about immigration on the campaign trail and trumpet recent advances made in tightening border security through the addition of U.S. Border Patrol agents and the increased use of high-technology sensing equipment.

It's all a matter of preserving jobs, housing and other benefits for U.S. taxpayers, and race has nothing to do with it, he maintained.

"Study after study has shown illegal aliens use more government services than they pay in taxes, so it costs taxpayers for illegal aliens to be in this country," Smith said.

"I have no doubt we're going to hear cries of racism. But the only racist thing involved here is the charge of racism itself," he added. Texas' Republican National Committee member Ernie Angelo, a diehard Bush backer, agreed, saying, "The Democrats would like to demagogue it into being a racial issue, but it's not."

Said Angelo: "I personally think that any country has the right to seal its borders and to control illegal immigration. I think the United States has had very inadequate measures to control the border. Whether you want to go to the extreme of building fences and digging ditches, I don't know. But it's not a racial issue. I think people of all backgrounds agree we have a right to control our own borders."

Angelo, a Midland oilman, predicted Bush will crush Buchanan and Duke on Super Tuesday, but he said immigration is one of numerous issues on which the upstart challengers are striking a responsive chord with voters.

Dallas businessman Jim Oberwetter, who heads Bush's campaign in Texas, said, "Buchanan and Duke talk about immigration. George Bush does something about it. This is something the administration has been focusing on for some time."

Jimenez finds all the tough talk about immigration troubling in light of all the economic, social and political contributions Mexicans have made to the United States through the years. She noted that the most decorated group of war heroes is of Mexican descent.

Erecting new obstacles along the border will only form a greater gap between the United States and Mexico at a time when the leaders of both nations are trying to forge a landmark free-trade agreement, she said.

And like the existing natural and man-made barriers, the new hurdles will do little to stop the flow of immigrants, Jimenez said.

"It will add to their hardships in coming, but they will still come."