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Rubio does little to endear Romney to Latino voters

Mario T. García | Apr. 26, 2012 NCR Today

Gov. Mitt Romney is now campaigning with Sen. Marco Rubio, a Republican from Florida, and there is growing media speculation that Romney might be seriously considering Rubio as a possible running mate.

Whether true or not, this comes with recent polls showing that only 14 percent of Latinos support Romney for president while 70 percent endorse President Barack Obama. In 2008, then-Sen. Obama won more than 70 percent of the Latino vote.

Romney's seemingly embrace of Rubio is aimed to address this major deficiency he faces with Latinos. The overwhelming Latino vote for Obama four years ago was clearly one of the major factors in his victory. It allowed him to win in Florida, New Mexico, Colorado and Nevada, all key contested states. Obama will have to retain all or most of these states if he is to retain his office.

In a close state-by-state election, if Romney can cut into the Latino vote, it could swing these states and possibly others, such as Arizona, Indiana and Missouri, into his column. Rubio is intended for now to indicate that Romney supports Latinos, though he has yet to spell out how his future policies, including his policy on immigration, would advance the interests of Latinos.

Certainly, his extreme right-wing position on immigration paralleling Arizona's anti-immigrant legislation has soured him to many Latinos. Romney doesn't seem to understand that for Latinos, the immigration issue isn't just a matter of public policy; it's a matter of status and respect. Because the immigration legislation passed by states, including Arizona and Alabama, also smacks of racial profiling of Latinos, many if not most Latinos identify these laws and attitudes as anti-Latino.

This includes U.S.-born Latinos, the majority of the Latino population, who have worked hard to be integrated into U.S. society yet still face much anti-Latino racism. They are identifying Republicans as part of this anti-Latino movement.

Putting Rubio on a potential ticket with Romney won't necessarily help with Latino voters. Perhaps it will in Rubio's home state of Florida and with a minority Cuban-American vote, but not with other Latinos, such as Mexican-Americans, who represent the overwhelming number of Latinos in the country. As someone has said, "they don't vote that way."

Most Latinos will not vote for a Republican ticket even if it includes a Latino. At the national level, most Latinos have voted the Democratic Party since the 1930s, when they supported President Franklin Delano Roosevelt because they believed he felt their pain during the Great Depression. Moreover, Rubio's only partial support for immigration reform will not endear him to most Latinos. Only if Romney were to break from the extreme right wing of his party and support some efforts to legalize the thousands of undocumented immigrants in the country and to support the Dream Act would he have a chance of getting greater Latino support. This major shift remains to be seen. In the meantime, taking Rubio on the campaign trail will do little for Romney with Latinos.

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