

A losing platform

by The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

A sizable number of Americans once believed that Saddam Hussein was linked to the Sept. 11 attacks and that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction. Facts intervened, and you'd be hard-pressed to find many Americans who now profess to believe those two items.

Which is why no one should be more than just disappointed that one-third of Americans, according to a recent Los Angeles Times/Bloomberg poll, said illegal immigrants should be denied social services, including emergency health care and public education. A poll for the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute revealed similar views on illegal immigrants getting drivers licenses and in-state tuition but had folks deadlocked on whether children of illegal immigrants should be in public schools.

The facts that might intervene to change minds is that illegal immigrants already are barred from most government services and, in the case of emergency health care and public schools, both the law and simple humanitarian impulse dictate that these should not be denied. As long as the economy demands the presence of immigrants, having sick immigrants in our midst is counterproductive, and denying schooling for their children create even more of an underclass.

Another finding in the national poll, however, indicates that the tough immigration rhetoric on the presidential campaign trail could be short-lived. Sixty percent believe that illegal immigrants who have not committed crimes should be given a path to citizenship if they learn English and pay fines.

This was precisely what recently failed immigration reform legislation would have accomplished. Still, some GOP candidates now decry this as "amnesty." But they may find that, as a general-election platform, their position could very well be a loser.

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