



**Committee on Chicano Rights, Inc**

June 21, 1998

To: LULAC members.

c/o Bea M. Estrada, President

"LULAC was founded on February 17, 1929 by a group of dedicated people in Corpus Christi, Texas, who had the vision to step forward and SPEAK out for the right of equal opportunity and justice for all latin-American citizens in our great country" "San Diego LULAC is proud to be in the forefront of issues on education, job training, civil rights and numerous other problems affecting our Chicano-Latino community"..(from San Diego LULAC brochure, August 1997)

LULAC members:

For the record. Your "public personal insult" in attempting to "censor" me at your June 20, 1998 Scholarship awards (which I was invited and asked to be a presenter), because I was getting to "political" (I was speaking about the anti-Mexican propositions 187, 209, and 227 to young people) and that the politics might "upset" some of LULAC white benefactors...will not soon be forgotten!

Remember, in politics (which is war with words) and yes, education is political (just see prop. 227) one, either as an individual or as an organization has to make a decision on those issues which affect our life's and interest...one way or another. It is obvious, as to what every one witnessed on saturday, that LULAC has made its decision, loud and clear as to where and with whom they will stand with. One can run, but one cannot hide...in other words, LULAC has made its political bed, and it must now lay in it!

In closing, it is ironic, for all of the worrying, that some of the 'white" benefactors might get "upset", because of my

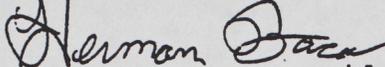
**710 E. 3rd Street  
National City CA 91950  
(619) 477-3800**

(2)

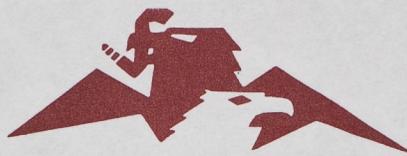
"political" statements, that the majority of the positive statements on my speech came from...white persons!

In ending, remember what the good book states...what goes around, come around.

Hasta la Victoria;

  
Herman Baca, President

cc. Dan Munoz, La Prensa  
Tomas, and Pearl Martinez Foundation  
CCR members  
American G.I. Forum (SD Chapter)  
National LULAC



# CCR

Committee on Chicano Rights, Inc

June 26, 1998

Mario G. Obledo  
President  
CA Coalition of Hispanic organizations

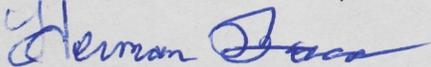
Re: Position of Support

Estimado Mario:

Regarding, today's "Obledo Must Go" rally in front of your office in Sacramento, CA by the "nuts" of the extreme right wing. This is but another attempt by the extreme right wing which has been successful in winning support for there anti-Mexican 187,209 and 227 propositions, to attempt to "shut up" any Chicano opposition to there racist politics. Let me state, that this are probably the same S.O.B. that attacked, and broke every window of the CCR office in 1995.

Quitate, y dale gas, we support your efforts to, expose this "nuts", and to alert our people about the extreme right wing's racist politics. If their is something which we can assist or support you with, give me a call.

Continua La lucha;

  
Herman Baca, president

710 E. 3rd Street  
National City CA 91950  
**(619) 477-3800**

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0504

July 16, 1998

Mr. Mario G. Obledo  
Past National President  
California Coalition of Hispanic Organizations  
Post Office Box 1026  
Sacramento, California 95812

Dear Mr. Obledo:

Thank you for contacting me to express your concerns for a proposal to use military personnel to assist in border enforcement duties. I appreciate hearing from you on this important issue.

During consideration of the Fiscal Year 1999 Defense Authorization bill, the House accepted an amendment proposed by Representative James Traficant of Ohio which would authorize the use of up to 10,000 military personnel on the United States-Mexico border to assist the Immigration and Naturalization Service and the U.S. Customs Service. The personnel would be able to assist in border patrols and inspection of imported cargo, but would not have the powers of arrest.

No similar provision was included in the Defense Authorization bill passed by the Senate. The differences between the House and Senate versions of the bill will now be reconciled by a conference committee. It is expected that final actions on this bill will occur in September.

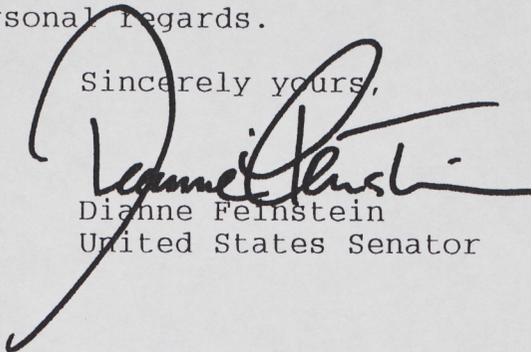
Protection of our borders against illegal immigration and illicit narcotics is a serious issue I have worked to address since coming to the Senate in 1993. The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act passed in 1996 mandates that 1,000 new Border Patrol agents be hired each year until 2001. I fully support the addition of these resources, and will continue to carefully monitor border issues.

Once again, thank you for contacting me. I understand how strongly you feel about this issue, and please continue to share

your thoughts with me. If you have any further questions, please contact Erik Raven of my Washington, D.C. staff at (202) 224-3841.

With warmest personal regards.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dianne Feinstein". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "D" and a long, sweeping underline.

Dianne Feinstein  
United States Senator

DF:ekr



# CALIFORNIA COALITION of HISPANIC ORGANIZATIONS

P.O. BOX 1026 • SACRAMENTO, CA 95812 • TEL (916) 441-3626 • FAX (916) 446-9221

July 20, 1998

Mario G. Obledo  
*President*

Keda Alcalá  
*Executive Director*

*Board of Directors*  
Keda Alcalá  
Sacramento, CA

Amador Bustos  
Sacramento, CA

Mateo Camarillo  
San Diego, CA

Gil Flores  
Santa Ana, CA

Marcela Flores  
Sacramento, CA

John Gamboa  
San Francisco, CA

Victor Lopez  
Orange Cove, CA

Luis Nogales  
Los Angeles, CA

Mario G. Obledo  
Sacramento, CA

Cruz Reynoso  
Los Angeles, CA

Fernando Zazueta  
San Jose, CA

Mr. Ward Connerly  
2215 - 21st Street  
Sacramento, California 95816

Dear Mr. Connerly:

I have just learned of your intent to abolish ethnic studies at California universities. What is it in your character that makes you so anti-Latino?

Many people perceive you as Gov. Wilson's slave - in fronting for him for his mean and divisive proposals. Slavery was abolished by the Civil War so you are a free man. Or are government contacts worth the selling of your soul - the turning of your back on your own people.

I understand the admissions for UC Berkeley reflect a drop of 60% Black, 50% Latino, and 60% Native Americans. This is a record of shame.

My prediction is that you will lose the fight to eliminate Ethnic Studies from our universities. So let's get ready to rumble.

Sincerely,

MARIO G. OBLEDO

MGO:dw



# CALIFORNIA COALITION of HISPANIC ORGANIZATIONS

P.O. BOX 1026 • SACRAMENTO, CA 95812 • TEL (916) 441-3626 • FAX (916) 446-9221

July 21, 1998

Mario G. Obledo  
*President*

Keda Alcalá  
*Executive Director*

*Board of Directors*  
Keda Alcalá  
Sacramento, CA

Amador Bustos  
Sacramento, CA

Mateo Camarillo  
San Diego, CA

Gil Flores  
Santa Ana, CA

Marcela Flores  
Sacramento, CA

John Gamboa  
San Francisco, CA

Victor Lopez  
Orange Cove, CA

Luis Nogales  
Los Angeles, CA

Mario G. Obledo  
Sacramento, CA

Cruz Reynoso  
Los Angeles, CA

Fernando Zazueta  
San Jose, CA

## PRESS RELEASE For Immediate Release

Contact: Mario G. Obledo  
(916) 441-3626

### Latino Leader Urges Economic Boycott of General Motors

Mario G. Obledo, president of California Coalition of Hispanics Organization an umbrella entity comprising 50 statewide community-based groups, and a recent recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nations highest civilian award, today announced an economic boycott of all General Motors products and voiced support for the striking GM/United Auto workers. "It is incredible for the leading corporation in the world not to grant its workers job security," stated Obledo. "The working women and men of GM deserve dignity and respect and their families need assurance of job protection," continued Obledo.

Obledo said he would ask each member of CCHO to boycott GM products in their local communities until the strike is settled.

"Corporate America must learn a lesson of treating its employees with fairness. Otherwise, it must suffer some consequences at the marketplace," concluded Obledo.



Committee on Chicano Rights, Inc

August 19, 1998

Sr. Gil Flores  
California State Director  
L.U.L.A.C.  
P.O. Box 4252  
Santa Ana, CA 92702-4552

Estimado Gil:

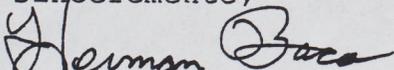
RE: OUR CONVERSATION ON THE FOLLOWING ISSUES.

1) The Taco Bell Chihuahua dog commercial and your request for my political support.-Rest assured that our organization will continue to fight dogs, whether they be the demeaning dog "Dinky" in the Taco Bell commercial, or the "mad dogs" (the border patrol) here at the U.S./Mexico border.

2) Your personal apology to me, on behalf of the San Diego LULAC chapter #2842.-As I stated to you, there is no need for you to apologize, because you did not do anything. It is LULAC chapter # 2842 that personally insulted me and attempted to "censor" me, because I was getting to "political" (speaking to young people about the anti-Mexican propositions 187, 209, 227) and that my "politics" might upset some of LULAC white benefactors.

Gil, allow me to be blunt, frank and truthful regarding the above. Until the day comes that LULAC chapter #2842 apologizes, or is censored, disciplined, or reprimanded by the state or national leadership of LULAC, I will have nothing to do politically with LULAC! My self respect demands nothing less. In other words, one cannot have a dirty room in one's house and state that one has a clean house. In closing, I wish both you and Mario the best in your political endeavors.

Sinceremente,

  
Herman Baca, President

cc. Mario Obledo  
Dan Munoz. La Prensa  
Tom and Pearl Martinez Foundation

710 E. 3rd Street  
National City CA 91950  
(619) 477-3800

# Billboard outrages Hispanics

## Civil rights leader vows to deface illegal-immigration sign at border

By Ruben Navarrette Jr.  
The Arizona Republic

The sweltering desert terrain surrounding the Arizona-California border might get even hotter Saturday during a showdown over a billboard that offers this greeting to Arizona motorists: "Welcome to California, the illegal immigration state. Don't let this happen to your state."

The billboard, near Blythe, Calif., west of the state line on Interstate 10, is sponsored by a group called the California Coalition for Immigration Reform. The message has outraged a prominent veteran of the Hispanic civil rights movement. "This billboard is a public nuisance and an affront to Mexican people," said attorney Mario Obledo from his law offices in Sacramento. Obledo, who considers the billboard "racist and divisive," has vowed to deface or destroy it Saturday.

— Please see **BILLBOARD**, Page B6

# Billboard outrages Hispanics

— **BILLBOARD**, from Page B1

afternoon. At 66, Obledo remains one of the nation's most revered Hispanic political figures. A former president of the League of Latin American Citizens and 1982 candidate for California governor, Obledo is no stranger to political causes.

And the billboard's message comes at a time when portions of California's Hispanic population feel victimized by ballot initiatives in three successive elections.

In 1994, California voters approved Proposition 187, which denied education, health benefits and social services to illegal immigrants. In 1996, voters approved Proposition 209, which eliminated state-sponsored racial preferences. Earlier this month, they approved Proposition 227, which eliminates bilingual education for California students.

"Hispanics in California are a people under assault," said Obledo, now president of the California Coalition of Hispanic Organizations.

The Huntington Beach-based California Coalition for Immigration Reform could not be reached for comment. An answering-machine message at the group's headquarters describes the billboard as the "next step in halting the takeover of (California) by illegal aliens."

A group representative has said



Damian Dovarganes/Associated Press  
Hispanic leader Mario Obledo plans to deface a billboard at the Arizona-California border paid for by the California Coalition for Immigration Reform.

its members are prepared to meet Obledo and his supporters at the state line to protect the billboard.

That has law enforcement officials in California bracing for a possible physical confrontation between the two groups, something that could be more likely if tempers flare amid weekend temperatures that could reach 110 degrees.

Central to the billboard's message

is the assumption that illegal immigration has harmed California and will do the same to other states.

Obledo disagreed, citing California and Texas as examples of states that absorb high numbers of immigrants and still thrive economically.

Ruben Navarrette Jr. can be reached at 444-4977 or at ruben.navarrette@pni.com via e-mail.

# With gusto, but no inferno, Obledo brought down 'racist' billboard

**S**ACRAMENTO — As late as Monday afternoon, Mario Obledo — however old, however frail — nonetheless was a man ready for action. For too long, the 66-year-old civil-rights activist said, he had remained outside the fray, occupying an unmarked office with an unlisted telephone number in Old Town Sacramento, nursing bad kidneys and a painful spine, but living what he called "a very peaceful life."

Now he was mad.

The object of his wrath was a huge billboard erected in Blythe, on the California-Arizona border. He read about it last May in the newspaper and at once began to seethe. The work of Orange County immigration "reform" advocates, the billboard had been designed to resemble an official California state road sign.

"Welcome to California," it announced to motorists on Interstate 10, "the illegal immigrant state. Don't let this happen to your state."



**PETER H. KING**  
California Notebook

The way Obledo decoded it, the sign was not so much a complaint about illegal immigrants as it was a slur against immigrants, in general — and brown-skinned immigrants, in particular. He saw it as more of the same, a sequel to those ominous intoned "they keep coming" commercials of the Prop. 187 campaign. The billboard's message, he would conclude, is "racist, one of hatred and divisive, and it has no place in America."

For weeks, Obledo waited for someone to step forward and do something about the sign. The

state ordered a repainting, so that it would not look quite so official, but beyond that, nothing happened. Obledo decided he could wait no longer: "I appointed myself to the task."

On June 4, he issued a rather bluntly worded press release: "The billboard will be set on fire or de-faced on Saturday, June 27, 1998, at 2:00 p.m. in Blythe, California."

Obledo did not appear to be kidding. He urged the governor to alert the National Guard. He researched vandalism and trespassing laws, anticipating arrest. Arrangements were made to rent a hydraulic lift — or cherry-picker — that would hoist him to the sign.

The idea of setting the billboard ablaze had been abandoned early. A sheriff's official called from Riverside County, warning that a natural gas plant was situated nearby.

"I would have blown up the whole town of Blythe," Obledo said. "Instead of McVeigh, they

would have been talking about Obledo."

He decided to paint his own message on the billboard: "Welcome to the land of opportunity," or something similar. Something "patriotic," Obledo said, something optimistic. His point was that it was not merely coincidence that the state with the highest number of illegal immigrants also was the most prosperous. In no small measure, California's wealth was created with the sweat of the very sort of people the billboard demonized. Anyway, Obledo figured, the right words would occur to him as he rose the next Saturday afternoon in the cherry-picker, spray paint in hand, a frail old man framed against what he considered California's latest monument to racial hatred.

## Antichimax

That was Monday. Tuesday, everything changed. Obledo was giving yet another interview, this time to a television crew, when the communiqué from the River-

side County sheriff's captain squirted from the facsimile machine: "Dear Mr. Obledo," it began, "please be advised that the billboard sign has been removed." The billboard company, Martin Media, had made the decision.

As a company official would explain, it was "caught in the middle." While an advocate of free-speech rights, it also felt obligated to look out for the property owner who leases the billboard site and also the companies — Burger King and Best Western — that shared space on the flip side of the immigration billboard. And so, early Tuesday, the vinyl sign simply was removed and returned to Orange County — along with a refund check.

Law enforcement officials were relieved, but the billboard sponsors were livid and surprised. They had been selling bus seats at \$25 a pop for a trip to a counter-demonstration Saturday. "It's been fairly traumatic," said Barbara Coe of the California Coali-

tion for Immigration Reform. She hurriedly was composing a news release for Wednesday. She wasn't sure of the text yet, but the title was set: "Terrorists One, Citizens Zero." She vowed the sign would rise again . . .

As for Obledo, there seem to be two ways to view the anticlimactic outcome. One would be that the activist was cheated out of his moment in the desert sun. The other is this: Not only did the unblinking 66-year-old bring down the billboard, but he did so without having to mount any cherry-picker. Only in victory would Obledo concede the point. Bravado aside, the notion of riding that wobbly contraption to the heights had made him more than a little nervous.

■ Peter H. King's column appears regularly in The Bee. Write him in care of The Fresno Bee, 1626 E St., Fresno 93786; call him at 441-6353; or e-mail him at pking@fresnobee.com.

# Sign company cuts out immigration message

By Ruben Navarrette Jr.

The Arizona Republic

A controversial California billboard near the Arizona state line was removed Tuesday for fear of a violent clash between those who despise its message and others who applaud it.

The billboard issued this warning to westbound motorists on Interstate 10 near the desert town of Blythe: "Welcome to California, the illegal immigrant state. Don't let this happen to your state."

An *Arizona Republic* story about a Hispanic activist's plan to protest the message generated dozens of

**ONLINE:** To read previous articles on the controversial billboard on the Arizona-California border, see this story at [www.azcentral.com](http://www.azcentral.com) on Arizona Central.

phone calls Tuesday, most of them favoring the billboard and advocating a crackdown on illegal immigration in Arizona.

But the owner of the billboard, Martin Media, removed the sign Tuesday morning because of concerns about a violent reaction to the planned protest by activist Mario

— Please see **DIVISIVE**, Page A7

WELCOME TO CALIFORNIA  
THE ILLEGAL IMMIGRANT  
STATE

DON'T LET THIS HAPPEN TO YOUR STATE

CALL TOLL FREE (877) NO ILLEGALS

SPONSORED BY C.C.I.R. CALIFORNIA COALITION FOR IMMIGRATION REFORM

Associated Press

Fear of a violent protest led to the removal of this billboard near Blythe, Calif.

# Divisive billboard + removed

— DIVISIVE, from Page A1

Obledo. Obledo had been so incensed by that message that he vowed to deface or destroy the billboard Saturday.

The Orange County-based California Coalition for Immigration Reform, which had leased the billboard for the message, had planned to bus people to the site to protect the sign.

That left California law enforcement authorities nervously bracing for a possible physical confrontation in the desert. Obledo said that he had even contacted California Gov. Pete Wilson and requested that the National Guard be put on alert.

As people in both states learned of the billboard and Obledo's planned assault upon it, the Sacramento lawyer received calls from dozens of supporters who planned to join him.

The crisis may have been averted by Martin Media's action.

"We very much believe in free speech," said Connie Wauhob, the company's general manager, from the firm's office in Bullhead City. "But our property was being threatened."

Martin Media received letters, faxes and telephone calls from around the nation condemning as un-American both the sign and the decision to take it down, Wauhob said.

"Martin had to draw the line," she said. "We did it to protect our property, our lessors' property and our other customers."

The coalition could not be reached for comment Tuesday. Its toll-free number apparently had been flooded with phone calls after the story in Monday's *Republic*.

Obledo was jubilant after the sign's removal. He said he may still stage a peaceful gathering at the site Saturday.

"This is a victory for America, against hatred, division and racism," he said. "I don't think these signs have a place in America."

Meanwhile, the coalition vowed Tuesday to travel to the desert Saturday and attempt to resurrect the sign. During an appearance on a Los Angeles radio show Tuesday, a representative of the group threatened to sue Martin Media for breaking the lease agreement.

Judging from the approximately 40 calls that the *Republic* received Monday, Arizonans either loved the billboard or hated it. About two-thirds of the callers spoke out in favor of the billboard and criticized Obledo.

Even Hispanics were divided on the issue.

"I can't understand how someone could put up a sign like that and not expect to get criticism," said Ed Cenicerros of Glendale.

Cenicerros, who judged the billboard to be aimed at Hispanics, called it a "hate sign" that was "absolutely racist."

Others feared that the sign's message was something best kept out of Arizona.

"This needs to be stopped right now, before the hatred spreads over here," said Rene Gurrola of Tempe.

But some thought the message was exactly what Arizonans needed to hear.

"People come here and take, take, take," said Alex Chavez of Phoenix. "Then they put the United States down."

And those divisions remained after the sign's removal.

"I think the sign was tacky," said a Mexican immigrant and legal resident who wished to remain anonymous. "It's good that they took it down but the damage has already been done."

"You have a right to your feelings but you should think of other people's feelings before you express them in such a way."

Others who had rallied around the billboard were outraged by its removal.

"This is in defiance of the First Amendment," said a caller who also wished to remain anonymous.

"To remove something just because someone objects to it is just not right."

Ruben Navarrette Jr. can be reached at 444-4977 or at [ruben.navarrette@pni.com](mailto:ruben.navarrette@pni.com) via e-mail.

The Associated Press contributed to this article.

## ▶ METRO/REGIONAL



Bee photograph/Penny De Los Santos

## Having their say

Russ Woodrum of Rancho Cordova, right, and others take a stand Friday in Old Sacramento in front of the office of civil rights leader Mario Obledo. A billboard calling California the il-

legal immigration state led Obledo to vow to deface it. After Obledo made his remarks, the billboard was removed. Woodrum says: "We got a problem; we are being invaded."

# California billboard pitching hate

Billboards have been on my mind lately.

On my daily commute from my driveway in suburbia to my job in that part of San Anotnio called "lower loopland" I pass what must be hundreds of them, lining the highway, competing for my attention with the assortment of technological gadgetry meant to keep me in touch.

It's an array of microwave emitters and receivers latched to my belt, connected to the lighter outlet, tuned on the radio, ready to play from my cassette deck of CD player. I'm equipped with choice, with wonderous communications options that a generation ago would have been a thing of fiction. And yet, the one thing that eludes my control, the one thing that the electronic wizards in Silicon Valley have yet to master, are billboards. What I wouldn't I give for a mute control for billboards.

Archeologists say that the earliest evidence of humankind on the Iberian Peninsula is a series of cone-shaped clay vases found in central Spain. These early people have been named the people of the "cuneiform vase culture" because of the pots they left behind. This fact brings me to ponder what present-day humanity would be called if



Victor Landa

the only thing that survived our era would be our billboards.

The "Hooters culture" comes to mind, or maybe the "people of Marlboro." In fact, my own face awkwardly graces a few choice billboards in selected areas of the city's South and West sides. A fact as uncomfortably conspicuous as wearing a tuxedo to a July 4th barbecue. What would archeologists think of that?

The truth is that billboards are meant to be obvious and subliminal at the same time. One must notice them and drive safely while talking on the cellular phone, changing tracks on the CD and changing gears. I'm reminded of the plate man on the "Ed Sullivan Show" whose act consisted of spinning multiple plates on the tips of long rods, keeping them spinning while spinning more and more plates on

more and more rods. If such acts existed today the spinners would surely organize weekly support groups to help them cope with the pressure. But not us, not the "people of Marlboro." We drive without a net, courageous in the face of distractions, of single mind amid the jungle of billboards pitching a sale.

On the border between California and Arizona, on Interstate 10, there is a billboard that has caught the attention of civil rights organizations. I imagine the attention comes because of the billboard's lack of civility. The billboard reads "Welcome To California: The Illegal Immigration State. Don't Let This Happen To Your State." It was paid for by the California Coalition for Immigration Reform, the same organization that co-sponsored California's infamous Proposition 187, that would bar undocumented immigrants from attending public schools and receiving social services.

There is no doubt what sale this billboard is pitching. With money and the backing of our constitutional freedom of expression the coalition is spewing hate. The pitch is this: California, the Golden State, the state of Hollywood, earthquakes, mudslides and Big Sur, has been victimized. Hordes of lawless

Mexicans have over run the place, turning it into something less than desirable, un-American even. The warning looms, "Don't Let This Happen To Your State!"

Mario Obledo, the venerable civil rights leader, recipient of the presidential Medal of Freedom, has vowed to deface or burn the billboard, and he has called on Latino leaders in California to help him in the days to come.

This is one bonfire I'd pay to see.

This is one instance of *bendito courage*, of holy wrath, that shouldn't go unnoticed. In the midst of the second world war, Nazi Germany printed stories and cartoons that depicted Jews as vermin, infesting society, causing harm. This billboard is no different.

And if given the choice I would rather have the archeologists of future generations find the charred remains of a billboard on IH 10 than to have them find evidence that a people were insulted and no one stood up to the affront.

"Hooters culture" and "people of Marlboro" we may deserve, being the avid consumers that we are. But to avoid this billboard of hate would be a disgrace.

Victor Landa is news director of KVDA-TV, Channel 60.

San Antonio Express News 6/28/98

# EDITORIALS

THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC

Editor  
Keven Ann Willey  
444-8660

## BENSON'S VIEW

Steve Benson  
444-8035



# Immigration anger much wider than billboard

It was supposed to have gone away by now, the California roil over illegal immigration. Once the state's economy regained its footing, tensions over undocumented workers and immigrants in general were expected to fade. This had long been the cyclical pattern: In down times, Californians fret about their porous border; in flush times, it's a nod and a wink and welcome, amigo.

Well, nobody seems to be nodding and winking much anymore. Four years after the bitter Proposition 187 campaign, with unemployment low and the state government fat, the immigration issue seems as emotionally potent as ever. Perhaps it is a sign that the economic recovery has not been as robust as the numbers suggest. Or perhaps it reflects a fundamental shift in how Californians regard the people who come north to pick their fruit, hang their frywall, bus their tables.

Whatever the reason, that the border can ignite political lightning still was amply demonstrated last week in the dust-up over a billboard down in the desert town of Blythe. Civil rights activist Mario Obledo, offended by the sign mocking California as the "illegal immigrant state," threatened to deface it. Before he could do so, however, the billboard company — caught between Obledo and Orange County immigration activists sponsoring the message — simply took the billboard down.

One would have thought the Statue of



**PETER H. KING** California Notebook

Liberty itself had been toppled.

On the morning after, the group responsible for the sign unleashed a press release that made its way onto the Internet. "Illegal immigration," thundered the California Coalition for Immigration Reform, "has cost us dearly — our jobs, our dollars, our schools, and now it is costing us our freedom!" The group claimed the billboard company's fears had been "justified," borrowing — liberally — from a column written by yours truly.

"On Wednesday, June 24," the press release stated, "the Sacramento Bee quoted Mr. Obledo as follows: 'I would have blown up the whole town of Blythe. Instead of talking about McVeigh, they would have been talking about Obledo.'"

This was more than a little intellectually dishonest. It took a quotation out of context to make it look as though the 66-year-old Obledo, a former Cabinet official in the Jer-

ry Brown administration, intended to blow Blythe to Kingdom Come, or worse — in the CCIR perspective — to Mexicali. In fact, the opposite was true. Here is the quotation in context:

*... The idea of setting the billboard ablaze had been abandoned early on. A sheriff's official had called from Riverside County, warning that a natural gas plant was situated nearby. I would have blown up the whole town of Blythe,' Obledo said. 'Instead of McVeigh, they would have been talking about Obledo.' He decided to paint his own message on the billboard: 'Welcome to the land of opportunity,' or something similar.*

Different, no?

Such distortions, of course, do not occur by accident. I will admit, though, the power of this propaganda trick was remarkable. My e-mail basket loaded up fast with angry missives from keyboard patriots coast to coast, many suggesting I perform anatomical impossibilities on myself. Radio talk shows kept calling in an effort to track down the crazy Californian who wanted to blow up Blythe. As for Obledo, well, he said the police were at his office last Monday, reviewing the tape-recorded death threats.

□□□

Not all responses were rabid. Some expressed concern about civil liberties, seeing Obledo's threat as an infringement on free speech, however odious. Many suggested

he should have simply financed his own billboard. I don't necessarily disagree, but look at it this way:

The CCIR people exercised their free speech by putting up the billboard, even though — as veterans of the Proposition 187 campaign — they must have known how distasteful it would seem to many Californians.

Obledo exercised his free speech by threatening to deface the sign (remember, he did not actually do so; in fact, he never made it down to Blythe).

The billboard company exercised its property rights, essentially saying, as it removed the sign, a pox on both of your houses.

And the Fourth Estate exercised its rights by covering the whole silly business.

A clean sweep for the Constitution!

Sadly, like much of the immigration debate, this incident was mere sideshow, beside the point — little thoughts expressed loudly. The forces at work on the border are much larger, and more complicated, than anything that can be captured on a road sign or spray-painted by a protester. They involve global migration patterns, economic imbalances, hunger, greed, fear, hope. They'll be around a lot longer than the billboard.

PETER H. KING's column will appear regularly in The Bee. Write him at P.O. Box 15779, Sacramento, 95852, or call (916) 321-1892; e-mail: pking@mcclatchy.com

## Latino leaders want Chihuahua ads off TV, threaten boycott

By Stephen Magagnini  
Bee Staff Writer

The Taco Bell Chihuahua with the Mexican accent – one of America's most recognizable television personalities – should be kicked off the airwaves, two prominent California Latino leaders said Monday.

Veteran civil rights activist Mario Obledo and Gil Flores, California director of the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), have called for a boycott of Taco Bell and Jack In The Box, which also is using a Chihuahua with a Mexican accent in TV commercials.

"To equate a dog with an entire ethnic population is outrageous, despicable, demeaning and degrading," said Obledo, presi-

dent of the California Coalition of Hispanic Organizations, an umbrella group for 50 organizations.

Besides the proposed boycott, which is to start in 30 days, Obledo said he will ask Latino employees of both companies to stage sickouts.

Flores said it was unconscionable for the food chains to increase profits "at the expense of stereotyping an entire ethnic group of hard-working Americans."

Peter Stack, Taco Bell vice president of marketing, said the commercials, which have been running since Dec. 28, were "meant to entertain, never to offend."

"We take any customers' concerns about our ads seriously," Stack said. He added, however, that Taco Bell's research, which

includes Latino focus groups, shows "overwhelming, broad-based support" for the dog and the ads.

"The first half of the year started well for us," he said.

A Jack In The Box spokeswoman called that company's commercial a humorous parody of Taco Bell's. "We had no intention of disparaging any groups with this ad," said Shirley Gines, director of corporate communications.

She added that Jack In The Box decided to retire its Chihuahua commercials July 26, before the call for a boycott.

*Bee staff writer Yvonne Chiu contributed to this report.*



**DIANA GRIEGO ERWIN**

## No need to collar the Taco Bell dog

*"What you throw rocks at my dog for? He don't do you nothing."*

**T**hose words were screamed at my father once when he was young and went calling on a girl. Her barking dog intercepted him on the way to the door. My dad armed himself with a handful of pebbles to keep the little dog back.

Her words became a joke in our family about the battles we start and how they may be perceived differently by others. So it is, I guess, with the Taco Bell Chihuahua. I don't know what to make of it, but to Gil Flores it's a serious matter.

I've met Flores and he's an intelligent man who cares deeply about the Latino community. In one way or another he's fought for others' rights most of his life. He's also director of the California branch of the League of Latin American Citizens (LULAC), the nation's oldest Latino organization.

His most recent public stance, however, is to take on Taco Bell for its fast-food-craving Chihuahua, who's turned "Yo quiero Taco Bell" into something of a national mantra.

Never before have so many non-Latinos been speaking Spanish, albeit with a limited vocabulary. To walk into a store and say "Yo quiero (fill in the blank)" is suddenly the rage.

One of my daughter's friends walked into the kitchen the other night and said, "Yo quiero a Pepsi. Please." The English-only crowd must be having a nervous breakdown.

Other companies have jumped feet-first into the talking-Chihuahua craze. Jack In The Box ran a less-creative ad parodying Taco Bell's talking wonder dog. Entrepreneurs also know a good thing when they see it. Go to a swap meet and you'll find Chihuahuas hawking an amazing array of goods and products.

But Flores and veteran civil-rights activist Mario Obledo are not amused.

Earlier this week, the men joined other prominent Latinos suggesting a boycott of Irvine-based Taco Bell if the company fails to pull the talking-Chihuahua ads.

Both believe the campaign equates an entire ethnic population with a dog, which Obledo described as "outrageous, despicable, demeaning and degrading."

Some members of Miami's Cuban community also are reportedly upset. Their problem is with a more recent spot featuring the Chihuahua in a beret much like one popularized by Ernesto "Che" Guevara, who helped Fidel Castro seize power in Cuba almost 40 years ago.

But response to the proposed boycott is muted in California's Latino community.

Many privately say they find the ads featuring the big-eyed, scrappy little dog clever and very, very funny.

Would they go up against LULAC and say so? Join a movement to keep the Taco Bell Chihuahua on the air?

No. Why bother?

First, they respect the 69-year-old organization, which has a legacy of sponsoring landmark lawsuits protecting the rights of Latinos.

Second, why open a can of worms against LULAC over a silly television commercial?

But they won't boycott. A friend pointed out that speaking Spanish is suddenly hip. Another drolly noted that taking the Taco Bell dog off the air would leave us with no Latinos of note on TV, and what would that accomplish?

Even in times that have California voters passing laws targeting minorities, immigrants and specifically Latinos, LULAC's contention that the ads imply Latinos are dogs is a long leap.

Sure, the Chihuahua speaks with an accent. But he's a dog. Maybe I've been desensitized, but I've never seen a talking animal on TV and thought that the animal somehow represented me. Could Mr. Ed the talking horse have offended some group? What about the animals in the movie Babe, some of whom had noticeable accents?

LULAC and Obledo both have legacies to protect, and the Chihuahua battle is barking up the wrong tree. President Clinton awarded Obledo the Presidential Medal of Freedom last year for his lifetime of civil-rights work. LULAC sponsored lawsuits abolishing Latino school segregation; another guaranteed Latinos the right to sit on juries. Its "Little Schools of the 400" was the model for Head Start.

As the century comes to a close, there is much to be done. Let the dog be.