

VIEWPOINT

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SAN ANTONIO LIGHT

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After the dust clears in Corpus, Dukakis image will bounce back



Looks like Mike Dukakis is in the doghouse. Not with his wife, with the American GI Forum. And LULAC. And the National Hispanic Chamber of Commerce.

When Dukakis failed to show at the American GI Forum National Convention in Corpus Christi two weeks ago, Hispanic leaders were ready to toss him in the trash bin.

Before the end of the week, San Antonio Republican Oscar Moran, past national president of LULAC, and Hector Barretto, chairman emeritus of the National Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, had announced at a news conference that both LULAC and the National Hispanic Chamber were ready to support Bush.

By Saturday, the newspapers reported this:

"Top-name Hispanic Democrats rushed to Corpus Christi Friday as a damage control team to blunt criticism of Dukakis."

Bush, by the way, made a personal appearance and addressed the convention.

U.S. Rep. Albert Bustamante was the first of the Democrats to arrive in Corpus, according to the media. Close behind were former New Mexico Governor Toney Anaya and Corpus Christi State Senator Carlos Truan.

Jose Villarreal, Dukakis' Southwest political coordinator, also was present to assure forum officials that Dukakis was aware of Hispanic veterans' concerns, the media reported the next day.

I called Villarreal in Los Angeles on Sunday and asked him some questions.

Is it true that you and the others were part of a damage control team for Dukakis?

"Of course not. Those who were called a damage control team - Bustamante, Anaya, Truan, and myself - are the people who are almost always with Dukakis when he campaigns in Texas, especially when he goes before largely Hispanic audiences. I go to all of them because it's part of my job."

Why didn't Dukakis attend?

"He was campaigning in western states that are also crucial to his election. We felt that because Atlanta had had such a definite Texas-thrust to it, it was im-

portant to take the campaign west. The convention podium was full of Texans. Ann Richards was keynote speaker. Jim Wright was convention chairman. Barbara Jordan nominated Bentsen. All this was followed immediately by Dukakis appearances in the Valley and in Houston. But other states need to hear Dukakis' message.

"It was a tough decision that had to be made. Not that the GI Forum, LULAC or the National Hispanic Chamber aren't important. Of course they are. Very much so. But the rest of the country's important, too."

What about accusations by leaders of these organizations that Dukakis snubbed them?

"Grossly unfair. What they have to understand is that Dukakis can't give all his time to Texas. The campaign has to broaden. We've got a national election to win. November is less than three months away. Still, I can understand Hispanic leaders getting upset. They wanted Dukakis there - everyone wants Dukakis there."

Have Dukakis' chances in the Hispanic community been damaged?

"Not at all. The bottom line is that our campaign has made the Hispanic vote a central focus of Dukakis' effort and he intends to aggressively continue to seek the Hispanic vote."

Does it bother you and other campaign coordinators that Bush was so warmly received by the convention?

"Quite the opposite. We're delighted that Vice President Bush was warmly received by a large and important gathering of Hispanic Texans. It was a welcome befitting the vice president and we're glad he got it."

What about the report by Hispanic leaders that LULAC and the National Hispanic Chamber were ready to support Bush?

"It's their privilege to do so. They are the spokesmen for their organizations. But I'm much more interested in what the rank-and-file members think. We're going to talk to them."

"I also think that LULAC ex-chairman Oscar Moran, a staunch Republican, was so obviously partisan in purporting to throw the support of all three organizations to Bush, the whole thing might backfire on him and hurt Bush in the long run."