

LATINO

## Progressive groups call on Democrats to lean in on immigration

BY RAFAEL BERNAL - 09/13/22 10:06 AM ET

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Associated Press/Chris O'Meara

Four top progressive advocacy groups are calling on Democrats to campaign affirmatively on immigration, countering Republican rhetoric on the issue rather than pivoting away from it.

In a memo released Tuesday by Community Change Action, Mi Familia Vota, SEIU and United We Dream Action, the groups shared internal message testing they hope will encourage Democrats to take a more positive stance on the issue.

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“Community Change Action, Mi Familia Vota, SEIU, and United We Dream Action envision a future where our society treats immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers with dignity and respect,” wrote the groups in the internal memo reviewed by The Hill.

“We know this vision is in jeopardy if the GOP gains control of Congress and other state and local seats across the country as they continue their dangerous anti-immigrant rhetoric that leads to bad policies and even worse outcomes for our communities,” they added.

The memo’s release two months before the midterms comes as many Democrats have shied away from immigration, although some high-profile Democrats in tight races have already leaned in.



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Bruna Bouhid, communications director for United We Dream, pointed to campaigns in Florida, Pennsylvania and Texas, where Democrats Charlie Crist, John Fetterman and Michelle Vallejo have released ads countering the Republican narrative on immigration.

“That’s what they should be doing, going on the counteroffensive. What Charlie Crist is doing is effective. Using something that’s quite popular and has majority support to remind voters what he’s about,” said Bouhid.

Crist is running for governor against Gov. [Ron DeSantis \(R\)](#), Fetterman is running for the open Pennsylvania Senate seat, and Vallejo is running for a House seat in South Texas.

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Using the motto “Biden’s Border Crisis,” GOP candidates have sought to paint the Biden administration as opening the border to smuggling, cartel crime and unfettered migration, often jumping from criticism of Biden’s asylum policy to domestic drug overdose statistics.

“You have people coming across illegally from countries all over the world. And so what has that gotten us? We now, in this country, have the leading cause of death for people 18 to 45 as fentanyl overdose,” [said DeSantis](#) in June.

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While both immigration and fentanyl seizures remain high, most experts agree migration flows and drug smuggling are separate phenomena.

“The probability [that migrants are] going to carry some kind of illicit narcotic is probably close to zero,” Victor Manjarrez, director for the Center for Law and Human Behavior at the University of Texas, El Paso, [told NPR last month](#).

And that’s a distinction the four groups underwriting the memo believe voters can make.

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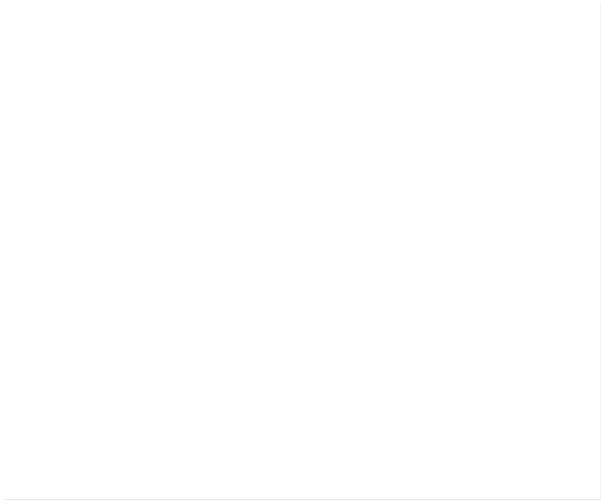
“There are a lot of different things the Democratic Party can point to in a positive way to counter these attacks, but we’re hearing silence,” said Bouhid.

The most accessible issue for Democrats laid out in the memo is a defense of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program.

That program is popular with voters across the political spectrum, and its popularity resisted a Republican push to frame it as executive overreach by the Obama administration, and a concerted effort to shut it down through the court system and through administrative action by the Trump administration.

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The groups tested a variety of messages in different states, measuring their power to mobilize certain groups of voters and noting where other groups were discouraged from voting.

“A handful of Republican politicians are obsessed with uprooting our communities by deporting DACA recipients and their families. They are fueling fears about immigrants as a way to divide us. But, we know the truth, DACA recipients, and all immigrants, play a vital role in creating thriving communities. We need to elect politicians who will defend the right of DACA recipients to stay in our communities with a pathway to citizenship,” it said.

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The groups found that messages attacking Republicans for their stance on programs like DACA and messages heightening the dignity of asylum-seekers were most likely to discourage conservatives from voting.

The memo was released publicly by the four groups' independent expenditure wings, meaning they are not allowed to directly coordinate or donate to campaigns.

Community Change Action is the political wing of Community change, a group founded in 1968 as a civil rights and low-income community organizer; Mi Familia Vota is one of the country's largest grassroots Latino voter organizations; SEIU is a union that represents nearly 2 million workers in health care, property services and government; and United We Dream Action is the political wing of United We Dream, a youth immigrant advocacy organization.

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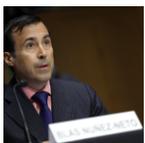
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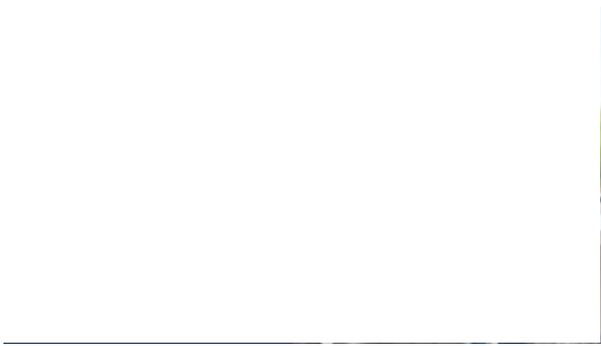
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**Which one of these Republican presidential candidates do you personally support right now?**

- Chris Christie
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