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Freddy Balsera: 'How Obama Closed the Deal With Hispanics'

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The following release is being issued by Freddy Balsera, Managing Partner of Balsera Communications:

Three weeks before the November election, the Obama campaign's Hispanic media team bucked the trend of negative campaigning and took the bold move of making its entire paid Spanish language message completely positive. Gone were the criticisms of John McCain or the attacks on his policies. They were replaced instead with uplifting messages on how Obama would help Hispanic families achieve the American dream through lower taxes, access to health care and college assistance. A strategy of hope and promise versus defamation and fear mongering was how Obama closed the deal with Hispanic voters.

Having the discipline to resist counter punching while the other side is spewing venom at you is easier said than done. To put things in perspective, this course was charted at a moment when McCain and the Republicans were painting Obama as responsible for everything wrong in the lives of Latinos: the defeat of the immigration bill, abortions among teenage girls and crime in the inner city. In Miami, where I live, it went a step further. McCain and his surrogates appeared more like McCarthy, unabashedly portraying Obama as a communist in dramatic Cold War fashion. According to them, Obama had more in common with Fidel Castro, Hugo Chavez and Daniel Ortega than with Franklin Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy and Bill Clinton. They were serving up heaping portions of

red meat to their base by engaging in a Latino “culture war.” One hundred percent of McCain’s Spanish television and radio ads in the country were negative. And in the midst of this maelstrom of attacks and distortion, the Obama Hispanic media team took a deep breath and realized that McCain was missing the boat with Latino voters. It was yet another example of McCain just not getting it. Latinos didn’t want to hear insults and attacks; they wanted high minded politics based on plans and ideas. They wanted solutions to their problems.

The pundits who said during the primary process that Hispanics would not support an African American candidate clearly didn’t understand how our community thinks and acts. They completely misread why Hillary Clinton received a disproportionate amount of Hispanic support during the primaries. It wasn’t about rejecting a black candidate like the so-called experts said; it was about supporting someone they believed in and felt they had a relationship with. So Obama’s challenge in the general election was to develop his own relationship and level of comfort with Hispanics. He lived up to that.

The McCain campaign rode into the general election with blinders on, feeling almost arrogantly confident and strong about McCain’s popularity among Hispanics because of his role on immigration reform. Granted, that is an important issue to Hispanic voters and he showed tremendous leadership on it, but what they failed to recognize is that immigration isn’t the only issue that mattered to Hispanics in this election.

Unemployment, lack of health care coverage, the war and gas prices are affecting Hispanics the same as everyone else. For McCain, being good on immigration wasn’t enough in the eyes of Hispanics if they disagreed with his views on every other issue. Hispanics wanted someone to vote for, not against. And McCain never told Hispanics what he stood for and why we should vote for him; he only told us why not to vote for Obama. That’s just not good enough anymore. Meanwhile, Obama dedicated himself to telling Hispanic voters who he was and how he would lift us up through better paying jobs, greater access to health care and college assistance for our kids. The clincher was when he said it himself in Spanish in his last TV spot “Sueno Americano.”

This election is the greatest example of the evolution of the Hispanic electorate. Our community played a critical role in battleground states like Colorado, Florida, North Carolina, Nevada, New Mexico, Pennsylvania and Virginia. Moreover, Hispanics showed that even though we strive to preserve our culture and traditions, we are also very proud of being new Americans and take the future of this country very seriously. We came here seeking the American dream and want the very best for this country and all of its people. Obama made Hispanics feel respected by talking about issues in a way that inspired us. He invested in our community and made a historic effort to communicate his vision in terms that were meaningful and effective to Spanish speaking voters. In the end, he showed Hispanics that he understood us. The Obama campaign’s Hispanic campaign was the most prolific in the history of presidential politics, and it was done the right way. Freddy Balsera is the Managing Partner of Balsera Communications. He helped develop Obama’s Hispanic message and media campaign and also served as a Latino surrogate for the campaign.

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