

GOP Senate ads criticized for immigrant stereotypes

BY AUSTIN HORN
LEXINGTON HERALD-LEADER

LEXINGTON — Three commercials bashing leading Republican candidates for U.S. Senate in Kentucky contain negative stereotypes of Hispanic Americans. They also lack context in the broad claims they make about candidates, Rep. Andy Barr and Lexington tech entrepreneur Nate Morris.

Two ads from political action committees — one affiliated with conservative group Club For Growth, and another backed by the richest man in the world, Elon Musk — use generative AI-crafted images of Mexican culture and people to claim Barr is too soft on immigration. One ad is narrated with an exaggerated Mexican accent and shows heavily tattooed caricatures of Hispanic men, while the other displays a mob of immigrants invading the country and marching to Kentucky.

Another ad from Keep America Great PAC, the primary political action committee supporting Barr, features a young Hispanic man laughing and throwing cash at the camera as a narrator claims “Fake Nate backed taxpayer cash for illegals.”

Immigration and race have become leading factors in the race. Barr stirred discussion with an ad earlier this year proclaiming it’s “not a sin to be white,” and Morris has called for a total moratorium on all immigration. The two men have tried to portray the other as squishy on immigration and matters of so-called “woke” politics.

In a race where all three leading candidates — Barr, Morris and former Kentucky Attorney General Daniel Cameron — agree on nearly every policy item, aligning themselves with President Donald Trump’s administration, rifts are rare.

So supporters of Barr and Morris have plumbed their opponents’ past for possible examples of “anti-conservative” viewpoints, primarily on immigration.

The three recent ads stretch the truth in the process.

They also reinforce negative stereotypes against immigrants, some of Kentucky’s top immigrant office-holders told the Herald-Leader.

Lexington-Fayette Urban County Government Vice Mayor Dan Wu, the top vote-getter in the 2022 at-large council race, was born in China and

moved to the U.S. as a child. He called both ads “hateful.”

“It’s sad and maddening to think that our candidates for public office need to use AI imagery, cultural stereotypes, and hateful rhetoric in order to win,” Wu wrote in a statement.

Louisville Democratic state Rep. Nima Kulkarni is a naturalized citizen who works as an immigration attorney. She called the ads a “race to the bottom” and “disgraceful.”

“These disappointing ads prolong false narratives about immigrants. Studies show that the vast majority of immigrants are productive citizens who have never committed crimes,” Kulkarni wrote in a statement. “I’m saddened to see this race to the bottom that uses immigrants as campaign weapons ... Voters will see these ads for what they are: disgraceful campaign antics.”

Cameron has not been the primary subject of any attacks, both in advertisements and on a recent debate stage. Cameron continues to poll either in the lead or close to it, but has raised very little money compared to Barr and Morris, who has padded his campaign coffers largely with his own money; unlike Barr and Morris, Cameron does not have an outside group spending heavily on his behalf as of yet.

WIN IT BACK AD

The ad from Win It Back PAC, a group affiliated with the pro-free market advocacy group Club for Growth, opens with a narrator speaking in an exaggerated Mexican accent.

“In México, they call him ‘Amnesty Andy,’ an illegal alien’s best amigo,” the ad begins.

The ad features AI-generated images, including an adobe-style structure adorned with a large “Amnesty Andy Barr” sign. The ad flashes imagery of migrant caravans moving from Latin America in the hopes of entering the U.S., immigrants scaling a border fence, and three shirtless Hispanic men walking on a country road, all sporting backpacks and face tattoos.

“Amnesty Andy Barr voted to let millions of illegal aliens stay in our country, free to roam about Kentucky — a free pass to break the law,” it says.

The end of the ad features the three tattooed men walking through a small town, waving American flags, sporting

University of Kentucky gear and drinking beer.

“Illegals first, America last — that’s Amnesty Andy,” the ad ends.

The proof provided in the ad by Win It Back in making those statements about Barr does not fit the broad nature of its claims.

The ad plays a brief clip from a 2019 interview Barr conducted with the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce where Barr said he supported policy that would have granted so-called “Dreamers,” a population of roughly 3.4 million undocumented immigrants who were brought to the United States as children, temporary legal status for six years and the opportunity to apply for a green card.

The referenced 2018 bill — supported at the time by most of the GOP House and Trump himself — also would have allocated \$25 billion for a southern border wall, made it more difficult for asylum seekers to enter the country and would have significantly cut legal immigration levels.

So, the scope of Barr’s 2019 comments applies to a much more limited set of people than the estimated total of 14 million undocumented immigrants living in the country. It would not apply to the immigrant caravans displayed in the ad, nor would it to the tattooed men also presented in the ad as recently crossing the border.

In a statement, Barr said the ad missed the mark.

“Let’s be clear: I never have and never will support amnesty. Win It Back is criticizing me for voting to support President Trump’s plans to secure the border, build the wall, and enforce our laws. Just like President Trump said in Kentucky earlier this month, I’ve been with him all the way — and I always will be,” Barr wrote.

Win It Back PAC spent \$2.5 million to air the ad on broadcast television and streaming services over two weeks in March.

On Wednesday, Win It Back dropped another ad featuring Barr’s interview and applying his comments on Dreamers to situations that don’t explicitly include those people.

“An illegal alien in Kentucky caught sex trafficking two girls. Another, charged with killing a boy while trying to rape his mom. It has to stop. But, it won’t if Andy Barr becomes Senator,” the ad’s narrator says as a story from 2012 flashes across the screen.

The other story features the murder of a teenager in Morehead last year; an undocumented immigrant who reportedly crossed into the U.S. in 2021 was charged in the shooting.

Like the previous ad, the new commercial quotes Barr’s comments on providing “protection from deportation” for Dreamers, without mentioning that he was speaking specifically about that group.

KEEP AMERICA GREAT AD

The ad from Keep America Great, which supports Barr, features the claim that Morris “backed taxpayer cash for illegals” while a Hispanic man on screen throws money and smirks at the camera.

That doesn’t paint the full picture of what happened, even according to the PAC’s proof it provides in the commercial.

The ad begins asking about Morris: “How liberal is he?”

“As CEO, he brought in foreign workers for high-paying jobs that should have gone to Americans. When Biden gave \$500 million in cash to illegal immigrants, Morris’s company praised the plan. That’s right. Fake Nate backed taxpayer cash for illegals. Want proof: Here’s the press release,” the narrator reads before a press release appears on the screen.

The press release was written by Connor Riffle, then Senior Vice President of Smart Cities at Rubicon, and praises the American Rescue Plan Act. That bill was a \$1.9 trillion relief package heralded by former President Joe Biden and passed by Democrats in Congress.

Riffle’s 2021 post on the website of Rubicon, the software and waste company Morris founded, extolled the American Rescue Plan Act, making specific note of \$350 billion in aid for state and local governments, about \$130 billion going to local governments. Local governments generally handle trash disposal for communities.

“This cash infusion provides a rare opportunity for municipal governments to transform an essential and often overlooked function: solid waste collection and disposal,” Riffle wrote.

Riffle’s post, praising a Democratic-led, ambitious relief package that economists say contributed somewhat to high inflation, could reasonably give a GOP candidate like Morris heartburn. However, the ad’s statement that Morris “backed cash for illegal

immigrants” is misleading.

For one, Morris didn’t write the post, which does not mention any payments to undocumented immigrants. Additionally, the American Rescue Plan did not explicitly direct any payments to undocumented immigrants. The decision of some states to provide assistance that ended up benefitting undocumented immigrants was their decision — not that of Congress.

A handful of states gave cash payments to undocumented immigrants, most notably Washington, which accounts for about \$340 million of the reported \$500 million-plus.

According to letters and documents shared by Keep America Great PAC, Morris’ campaign tried to get television stations to take the ad down, sending them cease and desist letters.

“Although KAG PAC attempts to deceive your viewers by claiming that it has ‘proof’ of the ad’s claims, it has not provided any actual substantiation for its claim because it cannot. In fact, it is not surprising that KAG PAC was forced to resort to these deceptive tactics to prop up its fake claims. Nate Morris has made the implementation of a complete immigration moratorium a centerpiece of his campaign,” a letter from Morris’ team reads.

Keep America Great PAC’s attorneys responded stating that the “advertisement is accurate in every respect and raises critical issues that are at the forefront of voters’ minds in this election.”

“Mr. Morris never disavowed his company’s public positions, and the issue here is that his political consultants are starting to understand just how unpopular those positions are with Kentucky voters,” attorney Lindsey Melody Specht, of the Washington firm Dickinson Wright, wrote.

FIGHT FOR KENTUCKY

Using similar comments, Fight for Kentucky, the PAC supported by a splashy \$10 million donation from Musk, claims that Barr “rolled out the red carpet” for immigrants.

The ad features a seemingly AI-generated red carpet rolling out through a desert scene — similar to the terrain in the U.S. southern border region — with hundreds of Hispanic men marching along the carpet. The ad later displays the mass of men

SEE GOP/PAGE B4

Measure targets harassment of responders, including ICE

BY PIPER HANSEN
LEXINGTON HERALD-LEADER

A Kentucky bill to criminalize harassing or obstructing the work of a first responder, including police, EMTs, federal immigration agents and firefighters, took another step toward becoming law Wednesday.

Senate Bill 104, known as the Halo Act, passed the state House of Representatives 79-16 on Wednesday, with three Democrats joining Republicans in casting yes votes.

The bill creates a 25-foot “buffer zone” around first responders, making it illegal to interfere, threaten or harass them after being given a warning.

The legislation, sponsored by Sen. Matt Nunn, R-Sadieville, defines first responder to

include medics, local law enforcement and federal law enforcement, including Immigration and Custom Enforcement agents. Interfering with or harassing first responders is described as intentionally engaging in conduct that causes emotional distress with no purpose.

If a person enters and remains in the buffer zone around a first responder after a warning, their first three offenses would be misdemeanors. For a fourth or additional offenses, the person would be charged with a Class D felony.

In late February, SB 104 passed the Senate along party lines with all six Democrats voting no and 32 Republicans voting yes.

Since the House revised the bill March 25, it will be sent

back to the Senate for concurrence before being delivered to Gov. Andy Beshear.

Supporters continue to say the bill protects first responders, some of whom are volunteers while they do their jobs, said Rep. Ryan Bivens, R-Hodgenville.

“The focus of this bill is to protect first responders. It’s not to protect protesters, it’s not to protect free speech because we’ve already got laws in place that does that,” Rep. Mark Allen Hart, R-Falmouth, said on the House floor Wednesday. “This bill is to give clear guidance to how to safely protect our first responders.”

Those opposed contend the bill violates the First Amendment rights of Kentuckians engaging in protest

SEE ICE/PAGE B4

DID YOU KNOW?

LOCAL NEWSPAPERS and newspaper websites are relied on more than any other media for information about public notices and local government.

59% Local newspapers/newspaper websites

32% Local tv/cable

26% Word of mouth/friends/relatives

25% Local radio

24% Government websites

15% City newsletters

11% Public bulletin boards

7% Non-government website

5% Other

We Are Proud To Be
Your Local Newspaper



The Kentucky Standard

Source: The Kentucky State Study 2023: Conducted by Coda Ventures, Base: Total adults, multiple results

ABSOLUTE AUCTION SAT. APRIL 25, 10 A.M.

GAFFNEY CUSTOM HOMES, LLC
92.19 ACRE FARM • 7 TRACTS
4 BR., 3 BATH, 5775 SQ. FT. HOME
3 ACRE LAKE WITH ZIP LINE
MULTIPLE BLDGS. & HOMESITES

OPEN HOUSE: SUNDAY APRIL 19TH, FROM 1:00 TO 3:00 P.M.
LOCATION:
537 DAWKINS LANE, SULPHUR, KY. 40070

GAFFNEY CUSTOM HOMES, LLC HAS DECIDED TO LIQUIDATE SOME OF THEIR INVESTMENT PROPERTY AND HAVE COMMISSIONED BISHOP REALTY & AUCTION, LLC TO SELL AT ABSOLUTE AUCTION THE FOLLOWING PROPERTY UNDER THE TERMS AND CONDITIONS AS STATED ON THE ABOVE DATE & TIME.

Selling 92.19 acres and a beautiful 5775 sq. ft. home in 7 tracts ranging from 3.82 acres to 35.34 acres. All tracts will have frontage on Dawkins Lane and offer some of the best homesites to be sold at Absolute Auction in this area in a long time. This property is located just off LaGrange Road and just minutes from I-71 with easy access to Louisville, Lexington and all of Northern Ky. You will find that these 7 tracts provide an opportunity to purchase real estate in a thriving market that you can build a new home on, use for recreational purposes or an excellent place for you to invest in land that has tremendous potential for growth due to the prime location.

THE TRACTS:

Tract #1: 11.95 Acres with 603 ft. of frontage and a prime homesite and some woodland.

Tract #2: 10.69 Acres with 341 ft. frontage being mostly clear with scattered woodland.

Tract #3: 11.36 Acres with beautiful views and a good mix of cleared land and woods.

Tract #4: 14.09 Acres with great views and the perfect spot for a home. Mostly clear with a small pond.

Tract #5: 35.34 Acres and loaded with extras. There is a 36x48 pavilion, a 36x50 barn/shop, 22x30 concession bldg. with full bath & kitchen area, plus a 2.5 acre stocked lake with a 3-tier zip line platform and over 900 ft. of cable for a ride over the lake. This tract offers a great homesite or just an excellent place for a cabin on your own recreational weekend get-away. Woodland at the rear provides excellent cover for wildlife if you are a hunter.

Tract #7: 4.93 Acres of Country living at its best. This home is an 1830’s Log structure that has been built around and now has over 5700 sq. ft. of living area. Country kitchen with appliances, granite counter tops, poplar flooring, stone fireplaces, large laundry, double primary suites with baths, theatre room, bar area, covered porches, 4 car garage and a stocked 1-acre lake. Turn this property into your dream home or a perfect investment opportunity for a VRBO.

Tract #8: 3.824 Acres with scattered woods. Excellent lot for a walk-out basement.

AUCTIONEERS NOTE: This farm will be offered in a traditional manner as a whole and in tracts and will sell in the manner bringing the most dollars. The seller is installing a main water line along Dawkins Lane so that each tract will have city water available.

Restrictions: The property will be restricted to No mobile, modular or manufactured homes allowed on any tract.

TERMS: 20% of the purchase price to be paid down the day of sale and the balance with deed and possession on or before May 18th, 2026. This home was built prior to 1978, and all prospective bidders have until April 17th to inspect for lead base paint.

There will be a 10% Buyers Premium added to the final bid of everything sold to determine the total sales price. Announcements the day of sale take precedence over any and all advertisements.

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