

Somebody Else's Problem Now-- Is Arizona's Immigration Law Sending Immigrants To Bordering States?

By Lily Benitez De Luna

For Univ. of New Mexico News Bureau and Talk Radio News Service

May 9, 2012

Washington, D.C. – With the pending Supreme Court decision on its legality, Arizona's stringent immigration law, SB 1070, will determine the viability of similar state efforts to curb undocumented immigration. Supporters theorize that the law will result in a decrease in criminal activities from drug smugglers and also reduce the amount of money Arizona's law enforcement and hospitals spend on illegal immigrants. Opponents predict that the law will encourage racial profiling and have negative effects on Arizona's economy.

Absent from much of the debate is one key concern; How will SB 1070 impact immigration in the Southwestern part of the country? Will Arizona undocumented immigrants return to their native countries in response to the law, or find refuge in Arizona's neighboring states, such as New Mexico, which has no equivalent law?

Several recent reports have indicated the latter.

Although the Pew Research Center (PRC) attributes decreased migration **numbers** to economic concerns, many argue that border crossings are at lower rates because of strict immigration laws such as S.B. 1070.

Census data for the state of New Mexico, released by the Federation For American Immigration Reform (FAIR), **shows an increase** in "foreign born population" from 196,006 in 2009 to 205,141 in 2010, suggesting migration from state to state is occurring rather than migration out of the United States.

The Department of Homeland Security's estimate on the number of unauthorized immigrant population residing in the United States also arguably concludes that many immigrants are not returning to their original place of birth. Based on census data, DHS estimates 11.6 million illegal immigrants were living in the states in 2010, showing only a 100,000 decrease from that number for the year 2011. This leads to the conclusion that illegal immigrants might be leaving Arizona, but majority of them are not leaving the United States.

Resident Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, Michael Barone, upholds this argument by stating that migration into neighboring states is probable.

"We may see some illegal immigrants moving from Arizona to New Mexico or California," Barone said. "New Mexico does not have as high unemployment and I think

there'd be some marginal number of people going to New Mexico for that reason."

Angela Kelley from the Center for American Progress echoes his sentiment.

"It may be that, like what we saw in Alabama and Georgia after they passed their laws, that people went to a friendlier state," Kelley told Talk Radio News Service. "The idea of these laws is that... if we just make life difficult for them, they're all going to pack up and go home, the problem is that the undocumented are home, two-thirds of them have lived here for longer than 10 years."

Reinforcing the theory, Cato Institute Policy Analyst Alex Nowrasteh stated that since S.B. 1070 was enacted, Arizona's border states have experienced an increase in immigration rates, signaling relocation among immigrants rather than reverse migration. Economic prosperity in these states hints to the growing number of workers.

"An estimated 100,000 unauthorized immigrants left the state because of S.B. 1070 and they mostly went to other states that have Hispanic communities and lower unemployment rates than Arizona" Nowrasteh stated. "We know many moved to Texas, Virginia and New Mexico and subsequently improved the economy in those states."

Nowrasteh further stated that the Arizona's unemployment rate in April 2010 was 9.7 percent, rising to 10.4 percent within a few months of S.B. 1070's enactment. He attributes the rise in joblessness to the loss of immigrant consumers, businesses and renters.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics latest numbers, reports Arizona still has a higher unemployment rate than New Mexico and Texas, where Nowrasteh believes immigrants are heading. As of March 2012, Arizona sat at an 8.6 percent unemployment rate, whereas New Mexico was at a 7.2 percent and Texas at a flat 7 percent.

"Arizona has been in a worse economic situation partially because S.B. 1070 worsened the businesses environment in Arizona and drove people from the state," he stated.

While some are concerned with the economic and safety-related effects S.B. 1070 will produce, others are preoccupied with its moral implications. The Rev. Phil Reller from Los Angeles believes that the civil effects of S.B. 1070 outweigh all other effects. Reller is troubled by such consequences as the ones Alabama is experiencing, where it's reported that immigration legislation has caused an increase in bullying toward Hispanic students.

"When enforcement through attrition becomes acceptable, where does it stop?" Reller said. "Who is the next group?... Not just the economic issues, the moral issues." Adding that he believes this law further encourages discrimination against any particular group, "I think we can anticipate anti-gay, anti-Muslim legislation."

Experts do not think Arizona's anti-immigrant sentiments will spill over into other, more immigrant friendly, border states, such as New Mexico, California and Texas.

"I just don't see any likely-hood that a Democratic controlled legislature is going to go that route in New Mexico," Barone said. And Kelley said, "Some states... will be smart in pursuing friendly policies."

The fact that the S.B. 1070 attempts to discourage immigration and even motivate undocumented immigrants to leave the United States cannot be disputed, but, ultimately, the effect Arizona's harsh immigration policy is having on its neighboring states is still speculative, since additional statistical data on immigration population for the year 2011 are unavailable. Consequently, like the legality of the legislation itself, its impact on the Southwest remains a work in progress.