

Would ban on renting to illegals make sense here?

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Body

Gwinnett has something in common with Escondido, Calif.

It's illegal immigration.

In this California community, though, there's at least one distinct difference. The city's leaders, weary of the federal government's doublespeak and wordplay when it comes to immigration reform, have taken matters into their own hands.

They've hunkered down.

On Wednesday, by a 3-2 vote, the City Council approved an ordinance that **bans** landlords from **renting** to illegal immigrants. Barring legal challenges --- and there will be some --- the prohibition will take effect Nov. 18, according to wire stories.

Under the law, landlords will be required to submit to the city documentation of their tenants' immigration status. The city, in return, will pass the information on to the feds for verification.

If the tenants are found to be illegal immigrants, landlords will have 10 days to evict them or face a business license suspension. Repeat offenders could incur misdemeanor charges and fines.

Anyone who suspects someone is **renting** to **illegals** can file a complaint. But complaints based solely on a person's national origin, race or ethnicity won't be allowed. (It's unclear how this will be verified.)

Escondido has followed the lead of a handful of cities across the United States that have adopted renters laws. Other communities probably are weighing similar feel good, stopgap, legal and morally debatable steps to curb the presence and flow of undocumented workers.

It's easy to sympathize and empathize with members of this work force. They're merely pawns of our government, our employers and, in many ways, our materialistic zest. The ramifications of the issue extend beyond Jose's soliciting work at the Dunkin' Donuts store, though.

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In education, crowding and language issues tax schools. In hospitals, emergency rooms become de facto health care providers. And in subdivisions, where cultural differences can ignite clashes about code compliance, neighborliness has become even more of an anomaly.

Talk to people, real people who live in working-class and middle-class neighborhoods. Sympathy and empathy for low-wage (illegal) immigrant laborers is evaporating. Vanishing. A segment of that population believes their American dream has been hijacked, that it's going the way of the Edsel.

In a poll conducted Sept. 27-29 for The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, 90 percent of the respondents said illegal immigration was important to them in their choice for governor.

People are either fed up or close to it. They want grass-roots action, and in some towns and municipalities, officials apparently don't mind testing the fire, of being called racist, divisive, discriminatory.

Escondido has a population of about 142,000, about 40 percent of whom are Hispanic. It's unclear how many of the town's residents are illegal, something that's hard to pinpoint here as well.

Georgia is home to what the Department of Homeland Security calls the nation's fastest-growing population of illegal immigrants, estimated at 250,000 to 800,000.

Gwinnett's immigrant population is estimated at nearly 172,000.

I don't know what to make of the town's rental ban or similar ordinances in other communities. Part of me embraces the crackdowns, deems them necessary. Another part of me gives pause because I think some of the get-rid-of-the-illegals rants stem from (white America's) xenophobia.

So I pose a question to you:

Would you support a county law, or one in any of its municipalities, that prohibits landlords from renting to illegal immigrants?

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