

Opinion: Threats to immigrants' rights will grow in 2011

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Body

California voters sent a strong message this past election that we want hardworking, inclusive and responsive governance, not buck-passing and scapegoating.

Even some candidates who won seem to have missed the memo. **Immigrant** families and our **growing** coalition of supporters stand ready to remind them.

Two recently re-elected Northern California congressmen, Dan Lungren and Tom McClintock, announced last month that they **will** join a quest to change the U.S. Constitution to deny citizenship to babies born on American soil.

The 150-year-old standard has served our country well. Aides to former president George W. Bush agree, noting that it was Republicans after the Civil War who added the guarantee to the nation's charter as part of the 14th Amendment.

Those focused now on overturning it are ignoring voters' demands to create jobs and fix the economy.

Lashing out by the anti-**immigrant** crowd would be just a sideshow if it lacked the **threat** of federal power.

Iowan Steve King, leader of the amendment crusade in the House, is set to become chairman of the House immigration subcommittee when Republicans gain the majority in Congress next month.

King once held up barbed wire during debate on the House floor and compared **immigrants** without documents to wayward livestock.

Attacks on **immigrant** families and our human **rights** aren't limited to the federal arena. New California Assemblyman Tim Donnelly made it to Sacramento touting his involvement in the vigilante patrol group the Minutemen.

He used an appearance with Arizona sheriff and crackdown promoter Joe Arpaio to appeal to voters in the 59th District outside Los Angeles.

Donnelly wants to import Arizona's "show-me-your-papers" anti-**immigrant** law to our state. Foes of fair treatment for newcomers in California have filed a statewide ballot measure for 2012 with a similar aim.

They mean to instill fear in **immigrants** and our supporters. But they should heed a warning themselves. In my travels from Crescent City to Calexico, no issue has united students, parents, administrators, faith leaders, police officers, union activists and business owners the way that opposition to the Arizona policy has.

Roundups and racial profiling are costly, cruel and counterproductive approaches to controlling immigration.

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They defy common sense and constitutional rights. And they distract from comprehensive federal immigration reform, which is overdue in Congress and needs to pass now.

Repeating Arizona's mistake in California isn't just backward. In a state where immigrants and our allies are gaining a proud, sometimes pivotal, voice in elections, it's bad politics.

And there's a new means of accountability at the ballot box. Passage by California voters in June of Proposition 14 could mean that starting in 2012, the top two finishers in a primary election, regardless of party, will advance to a fall showdown.

Donnelly barely scraped by in a heavily contested Republican primary.

He might fare differently in a one-on-one contest with a more moderate conservative rival who has broad appeal.

Republicans who listen to the needs of immigrant families and reach across party lines to pass fair and sensible laws may be an endangered breed in other states.

But under the new top-two system, they could find new traction in California.

So will nonpartisan candidates, at the municipal, county, school and water district level, who proactively include immigrant families in their campaigns and priorities.

Intolerance is not deterring leaders who respect the rights and contributions of immigrant families.

Rather, it is spurring us to public service, greater scrutiny and accountability for our opponents' actions, and seats at the table in governing our state.

ANGELICA SALAS is board chair of the Californians for Humane Immigrant Rights Leadership and Action Fund. She wrote this article for this newspaper.

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