

Opinion: Ruben Navarrette Jr.: Texas GOP inexplicably joins anti-immigrant crowd

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Body

Parents, you know how it is with kids. One acts up, and so you have to focus your attention on the troublemaker and take your eye off the others. Then, when you're not looking, another one gets out of line.

States are much the same way. The eyes of the nation are fixed on Arizona, the undisputed problem child in the nation's immigration debate. But there are other states where lawmakers are eager to follow Arizona's lead and blame Washington for not solving a problem that, in truth, their own citizens (i.e., employers) helped create.

At least a half-dozen of the states thinking about going on this suicide run can perhaps be forgiven their ignorance because the experience of having a sizable illegal immigrant population is still new to them. In Utah, Georgia, Ohio, Maryland, Oklahoma and South Carolina, illegal immigrants are still a rather exotic import.

But then there's **Texas**, which used to be part of Mexico and where lenient immigration policies toward white settlers from the South and Northeast led to a famous tenant dispute that included a dust-up at the Alamo in 1836. In Tejas, Latinos are indigenous and as ubiquitous as bluebonnets. In the Lone Star State, where my mother and grandparents and great-grandparents were born and raised and where I spent five years writing about immigration and other issues for the Dallas Morning News, legislators should know better than to even flirt with the idea of adopting a divisive and dangerous law like the one in Arizona.

This was true even before U.S. District Judge Susan Bolton, in defense of the Constitution, ripped the guts out of the Arizona law by striking down its most egregious and indefensible parts. Bolton had her pick of seven different lawsuits seeking to block the law's implementation, and she based her ruling on the lawsuit filed by the Obama administration. The Justice Department argued that Arizona had exceeded its authority and trampled on powers reserved for the federal government.

Bolton agreed. She was particularly bothered by those elements of the law that all but required racial profiling by forcing police to arrest people they suspect are in the country illegally, made it a state crime for the undocumented to seek work, required legal immigrants to carry papers proving legal status, and allowed police to detain and arrest people who could not prove their legal status. So the judge issued a preliminary injunction against those parts. The rest of the law which did things such as making it a state crime to transport illegal immigrants was allowed to go into effect.

So much for Gov. Jan Brewer's bravado in telling the federal government that Arizona would "meet you in court." This battle is far from over, and the issue is probably headed to the Supreme Court. But so far, it's Common Sense 1, Arizona 0.

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But, like the saying goes, common sense isn't always common even in Texas. State Rep. Leo Berman, a Republican, is drafting an Arizona-style bill for Texas and plans to introduce it in the next session. He is bolstered by a recent Rasmussen survey that found 69 percent of Texans support bringing the law to their state.

Adding more fuel to the bonfire, Texas Republicans recently adopted an over-the-top platform at their state convention that, among other things, encouraged the Legislature to create a Class A misdemeanor criminal offense "for an illegal alien to intentionally or knowingly be within the state of Texas," and to "oppose amnesty in any form." Texas Republicans also want to deny citizenship to the U.S.-born children of illegal immigrants, ban day-labor work centers, limit bilingual education to three years and deny non-U.S. citizens access to state or federal financial assistance to college.

In a state where, according to demographic estimates, Latinos could outnumber whites by 2015, what the Texas GOP drafted was a pact with the devil.

All of which leads me to ask my friends in the Lone Star State the same question my mom used to ask me growing up: "If all the other kids jumped off a cliff, would you do the same?"

Apparently so.

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