

Justices go deeper in politics Supreme Court will hear challenge to Arizona immigration law.

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Body

WASHINGTON - The **Supreme Court** stepped into the fight Monday over a tough **Arizona law** that requires local police to help enforce federal **immigration laws** - pushing the **court deeper** into hot, partisan issues of the 2012 election campaign.

The **court's** election year docket now contains three politically charged disputes; the others are President Barack Obama's health care overhaul and Texas redistricting.

The debate over **immigration** already is shaping presidential **politics**, and now the **court** is undertaking a review of an **Arizona law** that has spawned a host of copycat state **laws** targeting illegal immigrants.

The **court will** review a federal appeals **court** ruling that blocked several provisions in the **Arizona law**. One of those requires that police, while enforcing other **laws**, question a person's **immigration** status if officers suspect he or she is in the country illegally.

The case is the **court's** biggest foray into **immigration law** in decades, said Temple University **law** professor Peter Spiro, an expert in that area.

The White House **challenged** the **Arizona law** by arguing that regulating **immigration** is the job of the federal government, not that of states. Similar **laws** in Alabama, South Carolina and Utah also are facing administration lawsuits. Private groups are suing over **immigration** measures adopted in Georgia and Indiana.

"This case is not just about **Arizona**. It's about every state grappling with the costs of illegal **immigration**," **Arizona** Gov. Jan Brewer, a Republican, said after the **court's** announcement Monday.

Fifty-nine Republicans in Congress, including presidential contender Michele Bachmann, filed a brief with the **court** backing the **Arizona law**.

The **immigration** case, like the **challenge** to Obama's health care overhaul, pits Republican-led states against the Democratic administration in an argument about the reach of federal power. The redistricting case has a similarly partisan tinge to it, with Republicans who control the state government in Texas facing off against Democrats and minority groups that tend to vote Democratic.

In the **immigration** arena, the states say that the federal government isn't doing enough to address a major problem and that border states are suffering disproportionately.

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The issue has been widely discussed by the Republican presidential hopefuls. They have mostly embraced a hard line to avoid accusations that they support any kind of "amnesty" for the some 12 million illegal immigrants estimated to be living in the U.S.

Newt Gingrich was most recently criticized by his opponents for saying he would grant legal status to some with long-standing family and community ties, and Gingrich has since endorsed the South Carolina law that allows police to demand a person's immigration status. That law is among the four state laws that have been challenged by the White House.

Brewer signed the Arizona immigration measure into law in April 2010. The administration sued three months later to block it from taking effect.

In April, a three-judge panel of the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco upheld a federal judge's ruling halting enforcement of several provisions of the law. Among the blocked provisions: requiring all immigrants to obtain or carry immigration registration papers; making it a state criminal offense for an illegal immigrant to seek work or hold a job; and allowing police to arrest suspected illegal immigrants without warrants.

In October, the federal appeals court in Atlanta blocked parts of the Alabama law that forced public schools to check the immigration status of students and allowed police to file criminal charges against people who were unable to prove their citizenship.

Lawsuits in South Carolina and Utah are not as far along.

The administration argued that the justices should have waited to see how other courts ruled on the challenges to other laws before getting involved. Still, after the court's announcement Monday, White House spokesman Jay Carney said, "We look forward to arguing our point of view in that case when the time comes."

Spiro, the Temple University immigration expert, said the court easily could have passed on the Arizona case for now. "They could have waited for the more extreme case to come from Alabama, which really outflanked the Arizona law," Spiro said.

He predicted the court would uphold the police check of immigration status but perhaps not the measure making it a crime to be without immigration documents.

Arguments probably will take place in late April, which would give the court roughly two months to decide the case

Justice Elena Kagan will not take part in the case, presumably because of her work on the issue when she served in the Justice Department.

The case is Arizona v. U.S., 11-182.

Hot topics on 2012 docket

The court's election-year docket now contains three politically charged disputes:

Arizona immigration law - The state now requires that police, while enforcing other laws, question a person's immigration status if officers suspect he or she is in the country illegally. The White House argues that regulating immigration is the job of the federal government, not that of states. Arguments will probably take place in late April.

Texas redistricting - Texas and other Southern states have elections scheduled under redistricting plans that have not been approved under the Voting Rights Act. At the center of the dispute is federal protection for minorities' voting rights. Arguments have been scheduled for Jan. 9.

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Health care overhaul - The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act aims to provide health insurance to more than 30 million previously uninsured Americans. But Republicans have branded the **law** unconstitutional, largely because of its mandate for individuals to buy coverage. The **court's** ruling is expected before July 4.

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