

## **Pro-Arizona radio show raises some immigration static**

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### **Body**

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The Justice Department lawsuit against Arizona's new immigration law is an Obama administration "effort to shore up the Hispanic vote in future elections," Sen. John McCain (R., Ariz.) told 200 demonstrators rallying in favor of the law in South Philadelphia on Wednesday.

Speaking by telephone to Dom Giordano of the "Big Talker 1210 AM" radio program broadcasting from the sidewalk at Geno's Steaks, McCain said "people in Arizona feel a little bit under assault" because opponents of the law have called for boycotts of the state.

The law, on hold pending litigation, requires police to confirm the immigration status of anyone they stop lawfully and suspect may be in the country illegally.

Arizona Gov. Jan Brewer, a Republican, said her state had to act because the federal government is not stemming the tide of illegal immigration from Mexico.

But believing that Arizona's law usurps the federal power to set immigration policy, Attorney General Eric H. Holder Jr. and a coalition of civil rights groups have challenged it in federal court.

At the same time, at least eight state attorneys general, including Pennsylvania's, have joined in a friend-of-the-court brief to support the law.

Sentiment backing the Arizona law was widely shared outside the steak shop owned by Joey Vento.

"I support the American rule of law. I'm not anti-immigration. I'm anti-illegal immigration," said Tobi Grant, a retired Philadelphia schoolteacher, who drove more than an hour from her home in Blue Bell to attend the rally. The event was a fund-raiser to boost Arizona's legal war chest in its fight with the federal government.

Across the street from the radio show, about 100 demonstrators banged drums and shook tambourines to try to disrupt the broadcast.

'Our voices heard'

"We are just here to show that there are a lot of people opposed" to states passing their own immigration laws, said Jen Rock, one of the organizers of the counterdemonstration.

"We oppose the trend of individual state action," said Rock, "and we are going to make our voices heard as loud as theirs."

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State Rep. Daryl Metcalfe (R., Butler County) has introduced a law similar to Arizona's in the Pennsylvania legislature.

Some of the counterdemonstrators held signs that read, "Real immigration reform, not hate-mongering" and chanted, "Don't give in to racist fear, immigrants are welcome here."

About 10 uniformed and plainclothes Philadelphia police officers were on hand to maintain order. While opposing demonstrators exchanged some nasty remarks, there were no altercations.

Vento, 70, said his passion for tough enforcement of immigration law grew out of the worldwide media attention he received in 2005 when he posted a sign at his shop that read: "This is AMERICA: WHEN ORDERING PLEASE 'SPEAK ENGLISH.'" The sign was decorated with a sharp-beaked eagle and an American flag.

Vento said it was just a request to customers so that the sandwich line would run more smoothly.

But the Philadelphia Commission on Human Relations, noting that South Philadelphia had a growing number of immigrants, interpreted the sign as an attempt to "intimidate" customers of certain backgrounds.

After a prolonged investigation, the commission charged Vento with violating a city ordinance against discrimination.

But in March 2008, Vento felt vindicated when the commission ruled that his restaurant had not violated the city's Fair Practices Ordinance.

Giordano, the radio host, said the idea to help Arizona raise funds for its litigation with the Justice Department evolved naturally in conversations with Vento, who estimated that he has spent more than \$50,000 on Giordano broadcasts in support of Arizona.

From the moment it was announced, the broadcast promised to be a lightning rod.

Pro-immigrant groups, including Philadelphia's New Sanctuary Movement, sent an alert to more than 2,700 people via Facebook.

The Independence Hall Tea Party Association, a "limited-government" advocacy group, turned out its membership from New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Delaware.

"The Obama administration has filed suit against Arizona in an attempt to prevent that state from enforcing reasonable immigration laws to protect its own citizens," said association president Teri Adams.

Fighting for others Vento said, "I'm just doing what most Americans would do if they could. I'm fighting for other Americans, my kids, my grandchildren. I don't want to head toward this Third World-culture thing.

"Arizona has a problem," he added. "What's playing in their movie theater, I definitely don't want playing in our movie theater."

In a Quinnipiac University telephone survey of 1,367 Pennsylvania voters, released Monday, 47 percent of respondents said they would want Pennsylvania to pass a law similar to Arizona's. Thirty-four percent said they opposed such a law for Pennsylvania, and 19 percent expressed no preference.

In Philadelphia, 48 percent favored tougher enforcement; 45 percent supported integration. The survey had a margin of error of about three percentage points.

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## Graphic

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Feed Loader

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