

Summer 2011 U.S. Immigration Alert!

A Newsletter from National Immigrant Solidarity Network

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No Immigrant Bashing! Support Immigrant Rights!



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Fighting injustice: Anti-immigrant laws blocked in Arizona, Utah, Indiana, and Georgia!

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Georgia Immigration Law: Thousands Protest For Reform At State Capitol

July 2, 2011 Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) -- Thousands of marchers stormed the Georgia Capitol on Saturday to protest the state's new immigration law, which they say creates an unwelcome environment for people of color and those in search of a better life.

Men, women and children of all ages converged on downtown Atlanta for the march and rally, cheering speakers while shading themselves with umbrellas and posters. Capitol police and organizers estimated the crowd at between 8,000 and 14,000. They filled the blocks around the Capitol, holding signs decrying House Bill 87 and reading "Immigration Reform Now!"

Friends Jessica Bamaca and Melany Cordero held a poster that read: "How would you feel if your family got broken apart?"

Bamaca was born in the U.S., but her mother and sister are from Guatemala. She said she fears they will be deported.

"I would be here by myself," said Bamaca, 13. "I have a feeling (the governor) doesn't know the pain affecting families. If he were to be in our position, how would he react?"

Adelina Nicholls, executive director of the Georgia Latino Alliance for Human Rights, said the crowd was sending a message.

"They are ready to fight," Nicholls said. "We need immigration reform, and no HB87 is going to stop us. We have earned the right to be here."

Azadeh Shahshahani of the American Civil Liberties Union of Georgia called the rally inspiring and said she hoped lawmakers would recognize the law's potential to damage the state.

"I think it's going to have an impact," she said. "Unfortunately, the damage has already been done as far as people of color having second thoughts about moving to Georgia."

Several different groups stood with the largely Latino crowd, including representatives from the civil rights movement. The Rev. Timothy McDonald, an activist who has been supportive of immigration protesters, was among the speakers showing his solidarity.

"You are my brothers and my sisters," McDonald told the crowd. "Some years ago, they told people like me we couldn't vote. We did what you are doing today. We are going to send a message to the powers that be ... that when the people get united, there is no government that can stop them. Don't let them turn you around."

MiLi Lai, a student at Emory who is Chinese, also attended the rally because the immigration law doesn't just apply to Latinos, but "all non-American people."

"We are the same community," Lai said. "We have to fight for our rights."

Bellanira Avoytes came to the rally with her husband and three children. Although she is a legal resident and her children were born in Georgia, she does not see herself as separate from undocumented Latinos.

"I have family who are not residents," she said. "I am together with the Latin people. I love Georgia. I have stayed here for 18 years. I want to buy a house here."

Saturday's rally follows a "day without immigrants" organized Friday, when some parts of the law took effect. It was organized by the Georgia Latino Alliance for Human Rights. The organization asked businesses to close and community members not to work or shop to protest the law.

On Monday, a judge temporarily blocked key parts of the law until a legal challenge is resolved. One provision that was blocked authorizes police to check the immigration status of suspects without proper identification. It also authorizes them to detain undocumented immigrants. Another penalizes people who knowingly and willingly transport or harbor undocumented immigrants while committing another crime.

Parts of similar measures in Arizona, Utah and Indiana also have been blocked by the courts.

Provisions that took effect Friday include one that makes it a felony to use false information or documentation when applying for a job. Another provision creates an immigration review board to investigate complaints about government officials not complying with state laws related to undocumented immigration.

Fighting injustice: anti-immigrant laws blocked in Arizona, Utah, Indiana, and Georgia!

We did it! In Arizona, Utah, Indiana, and now Georgia, anti-immigrant laws have been blocked before they've had a chance to wreak havoc on our communities. With your support, our lawyers have rolled up their sleeves and put forth powerful legal challenges to stop these discriminatory laws.

The anti-immigrant forces behind these hateful bills may not have known what they were dealing with. Collectively, we have declared a collective ¡basta! to the nationwide attack on our immigrant communities, stopping attempts to import Arizona's anti-immigrant policies to states such as Mississippi, Texas, and Florida. Where these pernicious bills have become laws, together we've organized, protested, boycotted, and taken legal action to defend our community's constitutional freedoms.

We won't stop here. Laws similar to the one that was blocked in Georgia now threaten communities of color in South Carolina and Alabama. With your help, we'll challenge those laws and any other law that tramples on the fundamental rights of immigrants and people of color.

This Fourth of July, take a stand against anti-immigrant laws that threaten the principles of freedom and equality that our country cherishes. Contribute to NILC's Immigrant Legal Defense Fund to ensure that all people — native born and immigrant alike — can live freely, work safely, and thrive.

Thank you for all you do!

Sincerely,

Marielena Hincapié
Executive Director
National Immigration Law Center

6/29: Texas Gov. Rick Perry's anti-Hispanic Agenda Goes Down

By Eliseo Medina and Al Martinez - The Hill

The Texas Senate adjourned this week without a final vote on the "Sanctuary Cities" legislation that was one of Gov. Rick Perry's "emergency" items at the start of the year. The bill, which became an umbrella for a package of harsh immigration measures, crumbled during a 30-day special session of the legislature as top business leaders urged Texas not to become another Arizona. The following is a joint statement by SEIU International Secretary-Treasurer Eliseo Medina and SEIU Texas State Council President Al Martinez:

Now that the GOP-led Texas Legislature has failed for the second time in two months to pass anti-Hispanic, anti-immigrant legislation, the leaders should ask themselves whether anything is ever accomplished by the politics of division.

The answer should be 'No.' Left in the wake of the horrible Texas debate is a failed political exercise that divided the state and did nothing to fix the immigration system.

The immigration package would have turned Texas into another Arizona by instituting racial profiling against Hispanics, imposing unfunded mandates on local governments, and draining the economy of a reliable workforce and tourism dollars.

None of that seemed to matter to Texas Gov. Rick Perry who promised right-wingers a harsh immigration package as he prepared for a possible run for the GOP presidential nomination. Luckily for the hard workers of Texas, some GOP lawmakers got tired of marching in lock step and let the bill die in the special session of the Legislature.

Perry's agenda angered Hispanics who feared being racially profiled under this bill. During one legislative hearing, Hispanics were chastised by Republicans for speaking in Spanish. At a public rally on the steps of the Capitol, the governor's allies complained that there are too many Hispanics serving in the state Legislature.

The governor and his fellow conservatives also frustrated law enforcement chiefs across the state, they annoyed the state's top business leaders, and they even caused a split inside their own political tent.

Two leading Texas conservatives, Norman Adams and Steve Hotze, noted the lunacy of the politically-driven legislation in a letter to the legislature that was reported by the Texas Tribune. 'Even if you think the majority of your constituents favor this bill, you should make your decision based on facts and reality. That is why you were elected,' the letter stated.

We hope that message also reaches other Texas politicians who serve in Washington, like Rep. Lamar Smith, who is pushing a jobs killing bill as part of the right-wing's campaign to drive away immigrants. The Smith bill would make E-Verify mandatory, which would especially hurt small businesses and the agriculture industry, while driving down jobs and wages for all workers in the U.S.

Politicians need to break their addiction to the politics of pander and the cheap sound bites, and strive to work on solutions that benefit everyone.

Comprehensive immigration solutions are within reach if everyone can agree to work for the good of our country instead of just acting like another Arizona.

Lessons from the struggle to defeat racist anti-immigrant amendments to the Massachusetts State Budget for FY 2012

By Sergio Reyes
Boston May Day Committee

3-Jul-2011.- This year again the Massachusetts Budget was the field that anti-immigrant politicians chose to include their nasty venom. We had a similar experience last year that was met with fierce resistance by immigrant rights advocates lead by the young people of the Student Immigrant Movement (SIM). Just like last year most of the racist, anti-immigrants amendments were either withdrawn or rejected but some elements remained. Therefore the victories were significant but partial.

The strategies used in this grassroots campaign however are very important for the movement nationwide. SIM took the initiative to carry out direct action by setting a 24/7 vigil in front of the State House to call attention to the amendments and to express a strong opposition to them. Once the direct action was initiated a support coalition was organized, this time called Mass Hope 2011. The vigil continued to be the main focus of struggle but at the same time SIM organized lobbying sessions following press conferences.

Meanwhile an electronic petition was initiated in change.org and a Facebook established. Friendly listservs carried out a request to call each member of the committee that was discussing the amendments. While all the activists who advocate for immigrant rights

supported the action, the stronger and weakest link was maintaining a constant presence at the vigil, which at one critical point counted with only one member. Later on the numbers increased again. We recognize the commitment, seriousness and responsibility of the young people who kept this alive.

Ironically many of our organizations that advocate direct action as an strategy in the struggle for immigrant rights were not able to support the direct action with bodies. Also some larger organizations whose job is based on lobbying also didn't mobilize their forces for that aspect of the action.

Another lesson is the lack of interest of the printed, radio and TV media. The Fox News studios is right smack in front of the State House but they didn't cover the action. None of the major newspapers covered the event either. The shining exception for commercial media was the New England news group Univision. This means that those of us who where not directly involved in the vigil should have worked on the local media to force them to provide coverage for this event but we failed to do so.

Likewise in reference to the detailed information about what these racist amendments were all about we needed to have some of the immigrant advocacy groups that count with lawyer teams make a better job at explaining them. Even after the event, there are still doubts as to what was that was won and what was not rejected. Below there is an attempt, using the very confusing www.malegislature.gov, to explain what amendments were withdrawn, rejected or approved.

34 - Bars US citizen children from state public housing if their parents do not have, do not yet have or cannot prove a lawful immigration status. (Withdrawn)

64 - Allows police to seize your car if they suspect you are undocumented and to keep it and sell it if you are deportable. (Withdrawn)

82 - Increases penalties for using or creating false documents. (Withdrawn)

122 - Requires any business providing any service to the state including subcontractors to use E-Verify

- Requires the state to investigate any tip relating to a violation of immigration law

- Increases the amount of times the state must verify immigration status

- Fine for fraudulent driving learner's permit

- Most benefits programs would have to document legal status

- Bars instate for undocumented

- Limits the receipt of all medical benefits to lawfully present residents including emergency Medicaid, Healthy Start and the Health Safety Net

Sections 145A, B repealed, C, D to take effect in 2012 and 2013 respectively. (Adopted)

125 - Poll workers may ask for state ID from anyone before voting (Rejected)

166 - Requires all health services applications to be verified via federal database. (Withdrawn)

353 - Creates 24 hr AG hotline to anonymously report suspected undocumented workers

- Implement E-verify for all state contractors and vendors, and any subcontractors working with them. (Withdrawn)

385 - Requires a license or state ID to register a vehicle; increases the penalties associated with using, creating, selling, or distributing an altered or false ID. (Withdrawn)

407 - Increases penalties for driving without a license (Withdrawn)

447 - Requires a Social Security number for all medical applications (Withdrawn)

Finally, we need to reiterate our gratitude and appreciation to the Student Immigrant Movement for this victory, which they won sacrificing their comfort for all immigrants and the non-immigrants who cannot stand the ugly face of injustice.

Jerry Brown betrays farm workers with veto of key legislation

Analysis: Brown hedges his political bets with veto of farmworker 'card check' bill

Josh Richman - Oakland Tribune

July 2, 2011

Some Democrats say Gov. Jerry Brown checkmated their hopes Tuesday with his last-minute veto of the "card check" bill for farm workers, but analysts say he's playing a bigger game of chess.

The United Farm Workers, whom Brown courted last year by reminding them of his ties to founder Cesar Chavez, saw him as their best hope for passage of their longtime top legislative priority: letting unions bargain for employees without an election, by just gathering signatures from a majority of workers affirming they wanted to be represented.

Brown this week sounded as sympathetic as one can in a veto message.

"SB 104 is indeed a drastic change and I appreciate the frustrations that have given rise to it. But, I am not yet convinced that the far-reaching proposals of this bill -- which alter in a significant way the guiding assumptions of the ALRA -- are justified," he wrote, referring to the Agricultural Labor Relations Act he signed into law in 1975. "I am deeply committed to the success of the ALRA and stand ready to engage in whatever discussions -- public and private -- that will accomplish the appropriate changes."

State Senate President Pro Tem Darrell Steinberg, D-Sacramento, SB 104's author, said Brown had "missed a historic opportunity to help the hardest working people in California improve their standard of living and working conditions. I will continue to fight for their cause."

So might Brown, experts say -- just not now.

"It's sort of like Obama on same-sex marriage: 'Hang in there, I'm coming closer,' " said Dan Schnur, a longtime Republican political strategist who now directs the University of Southern California's Jesse M. Unruh Institute of Politics.

"Every political leader has two competing simultaneous imperatives, persuading the undecided and motivating your supporters," he said. "Labor is not going to switch sides and go Republican in the next election, although (Brown) needs to make sure they're sufficiently motivated to turn out on behalf of the things that are important to him."

With three years to go until Brown seeks re-election, assuming he even wants a second term, he has three more chances to sign a bill like this, Schnur said.

But among this bill's biggest foes was the California Chamber of Commerce, whose president in March broke from the Republicans with whom he's often allied by agreeing with Brown that the state budget should include tax extensions as well as spending cuts. Brown's "card check" veto pleased the chamber enormously.

"The governor certainly recognized that we must all work to create certainty for employers and protect our economy, particularly in light of a state budget that relies on revenue materializing, in his veto of this job killer bill," Chamber President Allan Zaremberg said.

Brown had no reason to alienate the business community before he needs its support -- or at least its neutrality -- as he tries to convince voters next year to restore higher tax rates, Schnur said. "Having the business community on his side for that special election is going to be critical if he wants to succeed next year."

"The only reason to sign it now is because he thinks it's a good idea," agreed Corey Cook, director of the University of San Francisco's Leo T. McCarthy Center for Public Service and the Common Good. "It's hard to imagine an explanation for this other than his concern with medium-term political interests and how he can move the states on some of these other things -- he absolutely needs business support."

So what does Brown lose? The respect of some of who supported his election, surely.

In a post to the Calitics blog entitled "Shame," liberal activist Robert Cruickshank of Monterey wrote, "Brown pulled (stuff) like this all the time when he was governor in the 1970s and 1980s, vetoing or opposing legislation that his allies strongly backed. It infuriated Democrats and helped give an opening to the right. More of that "... is the price we paid for beating Meg Whitman.

"If all-cuts budgets and vetoing labor legislation is what we're going to get from Governor Brown, let's hope he decides on only one term, and lets California move on to better leadership in 2014," he wrote.

But if he doesn't? It's not as if the UFW and other unions, or Latinos -- who sided overwhelmingly with him in 2010 over Republican Meg Whitman, who had Latino issues of her own -- are likely to abandon him and flock to the GOP on this or other issues.

Meanwhile, he gains newly burnished credentials as a governor who's willing to buck his party and his party's prime patrons when he sees the need. "(T)hank you for saving valley ag by vetoing card check! I know it took courage to buck your party," Assemblywoman Linda Halderman, R-Fresno, posted Wednesday on Twitter.

"Brown is touting himself as somebody who travels the middle road and who as a result of that has the best potential for bringing together the polarized elements," said San Jose State University Political Science Professor Larry Gerston, who noted the budget process this year has been acrimonious and "this was an opportunity for him to build his relationship with Republicans "... an opportunity for them to begin the healing process."

In fact, Gerston opined, Brown probably has talked more with Republicans in his first six months than former Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger did in seven years. "He's wise enough to know that relationships are built on much more than a single vote or a single issue. You just don't want to slam the door when there are so many more opportunities for people to walk through it."

Brown could better have finessed his labor and Latino allies, said Sherry Bebitch Jeffe, senior scholar in the University of Southern California's School of Policy, Planning and Development. "I can't believe he didn't talk this over with the labor guys before the veto came down -- he's too smart to blindside his allies."

But "this is a way for Jerry and the business community to come to some sort of an agreement on where this goes next," she said. "And where are the unions going to go? "... He's not really risking a whole lot."

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About National Immigrant Solidarity Network

NISN is a coalition of community, immigrant, labor, human rights and student activist groups, founded in 2002 in response to the urgent needs for the national coalition to fight immigrant bashing, support immigrant rights, no to the sweatshops exploitation and end to the racism on the community. Please visit our website: <http://www.ImmigrantSolidarity.org>

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