Exhibit A: News Coverage of Anti-Immigrant Sentiment


September 12, 2012

After Mistakenly Purging Citizens, Florida Agrees to Let Them Vote

By LIZETTE ALVAREZ

MIAMI — In a partial victory for voter rights and immigrant groups, Florida residents who were mistakenly removed from the voter rolls this year because the state classified them as noncitizens will be returned to the rolls and allowed to vote in November.

The Florida Department of State, which initiated the review of noncitizens on the voter rolls, also agreed Wednesday to inform the 2,625 people on the list who are eligible to vote that their voting rights had been fully restored. Still unresolved is whether Florida broke a federal law preventing voter purges within 90 days of an election.

The agreement stems from a lawsuit brought by several groups that said the so-called voter purge was discriminatory because it singled out mostly immigrants. “There will be no purging before the election,” said Katherine Culliton-González, director of voter protection for the Advancement Project, one of the civil rights groups that sued the state. “American citizens won’t be purged, and naturalized citizens won’t be purged. For us, it’s a great victory.”

But the state said Wednesday that it would move forward with its program and would take a closer look at the voter rolls now that it had access to a federal database containing citizenship information. Florida received access to the Department of Homeland Security database, known as the Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements program, or SAVE, in July after it sued the agency.

County election supervisors are now undergoing training on the database. Once that is completed, the state will send them more names from Florida’s driver’s license database to crosscheck with the federal system, said Ken Detzner, Florida’s secretary of state.

Mr. Detzner said that the state had so far confirmed that 207 noncitizens were on Florida voter rolls.

“The voter eligibility initiative is already proving to be a successful process to identify illegally registered voters on Florida’s voter rolls,” Mr. Detzner said in a statement. “We want every Florida voter to be confident that their vote is protected and not hurt in any way by the illegal activity of others.”
Florida's initial attempt at culling noncitizens from voter rolls came under fierce attack after American citizens — the vast majority of whom were black or Hispanic — stepped forward to say that they had been asked to prove their citizenship or risk losing their right to vote.

In determining the initial list of 2,625 possible noncitizens, the state used an unreliable driver's license databank. For this reason, most county election supervisors opted not to move forward with the noncitizen review process, making the actual number of people removed from the voting rolls unknown.
Daily Court Reporter - News Ohio immigration status verification bill inspired by Arizona's state law

Ohio immigration status verification bill inspired by Arizona's state law

TIFFANY L. PARKS, Daily Reporter Staff Writer


Modeled after a piece of Arizona's immigration law, Rep. Courtney Combs recently introduced a bill into the Ohio General Assembly regarding the verification of a person's immigration status.

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Date Published: September 7, 2012

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Lawmakers consider expanded immigration powers for cops

By BOB BLAKE 419-993-2077 bblake@limanews.com | Posted: Friday, August 31, 2012 9:04 pm

COLUMBUS — Ohio Rep. Courtney Combs has seen firsthand the pathway illegal drugs take from the U.S.-Mexican border in Arizona all the way to his district in southwest Ohio. He’s also seen how little attention federal officials have paid to the issue. That’s when he decided it was time for the state to step up its efforts.

Combs, a Republican from Hamilton, has introduced a bill in the Ohio House of Representatives designed to give local law enforcement officers greater authority to verify the immigration status of individuals involved in traffic stops or other criminal investigations.

“It’s a situation where the federal government, if they would do their job, we wouldn’t even have to consider this, states wouldn’t have to consider this. But, they’re not,” Combs said. “I’ve been to the border twice and we have traced drugs from Arizona directly into Butler County. One of the reasons for this bill is to give law enforcement a tool that they’re able to have if a person’s been pulled over for a stop, or arrested or another crime they’ve committed they can ask if they’re in this country legally.

“If they’re not they can hold that person until the federal government does what they can or whatever they will do with them. That’s the main impetus.”

Combs introduced House Bill 580 in early August but is still awaiting a House committee assignment to get hearings on the bill underway. The bill calls for officers to make a “reasonable attempt” to determine the immigration status of individuals if the officer has “reasonable suspicion” an individual is in the country illegally. The bill restricts how an officer determines reasonable suspicion saying the decision cannot be based on a person’s race, color or national origin.

“I have tremendous faith in our law enforcement. I believe a police officer would not go out after somebody unless they had definite reason to do it,” Combs said. “A police officer is not going to jeopardize their job, their pension, their retirement in a situation where they could be accused of profiling. I included that in there to give some flexibility to the police officer that they have a right if necessary to ask the question.”

The bill also stipulates that every entity that operates a jail or place of custody in the state must designate an official to act on its behalf in determining the immigration status of each person arrested prior to their release. In addition, the proposal sets out that a person is presumed to be in the country legally if they can produce a valid Ohio driver’s license or an identification card from another state, a valid tribal enrollment card, a valid form of identification issued by the federal government or any document issued by a foreign government that grants the individual temporary legal presence in the U.S.

Those stipulations result in yet another unfunded mandate from the state for local governments which are
already reeling from deep cuts in state funding, according to Mercer County Sheriff Jeff Grey, president of the Buckeye State Sheriffs’ Association.

“It’s very frustrating from our position as I scan through this bill and we need to check every person who comes in the jail and run down their immigration status. I don’t know how many people they think we have working in the jails,” Grey said. “I didn’t see anything that gave us the money to hire people to do this. It’s another unfunded mandate coming down from the state at the same time the state’s taking money away from local governments.”

Grey said he questions if the bill is politically motivated, given the restrictions placed on officers in making their determinations of what is reasonable suspicion.

“You’re limiting what we can use to have reasonable suspicion but if you look further we’re supposed to accept driver’s license or identification card issued by another state or even issued by Ohio. Well, if I have reasonable suspicion to think somebody is in this country illegally, shouldn’t I look further in case they got their driver’s license improperly?” Grey said. “That happens every day in this country that people are getting driver’s licenses and identification cards fraudulently. I’m not being critical of the agencies that are issuing it, they have criteria they go by and things slip through the cracks.

“This law stops me if you hand me a driver’s license from California. California has more illegal immigrants than any state in the country. If I have reasonable suspicion, why would I stop when I got the driver’s license? Shouldn’t I look further? Really, shouldn’t I be notifying the federal government?”
Many suspected ineligible CO voters US citizens

By IVAN MORENO

The Associated Press

DENVER — Nearly a third of people whose citizenship and right to vote were questioned by Colorado's secretary of state are actually U.S. citizens, election officials said Wednesday, prompting Democrats to question the motives behind the effort to clean up voting rolls as a tightly contested presidential election approaches.

Earlier this month, Republican Secretary of State Scott Gessler sent letters to nearly 4,000 people questioning their citizenship as part of a plan to have them voluntarily withdraw or confirm their eligibility to vote.

State officials were able to run 1,400 of those names through a federal immigration database and found that more than 1,200 were U.S. citizens. Verification of the remaining names is still pending, but so far, the search hasn't turned up any non-citizens registered to vote.

Martha Tierney, an attorney for the Colorado Democratic Party, told election officials during a meeting Wednesday that they were wasting their time on a small group of voters instead of focusing on ensuring a fair and accurate fall election.

"This is a witch hunt and you should be embarrassed that you're going down this road," she said.

Gessler's office plans to release updated figures Thursday detailing how many of the 4,000 people responded directly to affirm their citizenship or withdraw their voter registration. He said no further action will be taken involving people who did not respond to the letters.

Democrats have criticized the effort to correct the voting rolls and said it could disenfranchise legal voters or make it difficult to exercise their right to vote. More than three-quarters of the letters went to Democrats and independent voters.

Gessler denies any political motivation and insists his goal is to maintain accurate voter rolls. His office said it did not look at party registration when sending the letters.

Gessler spokesman Rich Coolidge said that ensuring only eligible voters cast ballots is an important component of running a successful election.

"As the state's chief election official, he is obligated to make sure that only eligible voters are casting ballots," Coolidge said before the hearing. "We identified a vulnerability in the system, we identified people who exploited, or accidentally exploited, that vulnerability, and we're going to shut down that loophole."

Still, critics have questioned Gessler's political motivations in a year where both major parties see Colorado as key to winning the presidential election. Control of the state Legislature and competitive congressional races are also at stake.
Across the country Republicans have aggressively pursued initiatives to verify voters' citizenship, particularly in swing states, much to the ire of Democrats who worry that key parts of their base — Latinos and seniors — are likely to be disenfranchised.

Election chiefs in Iowa, Michigan, New Mexico and Ohio — all expected to be competitive in November — joined Colorado and other states asking the federal government for access to the database to verify citizenship. Colorado got access to the database last week.

Samantha Meiring, 37, a Colorado voter whose status was questioned, waved a letter as she told election officials Wednesday that she was speaking "as an immigrant and U.S. citizen who got a lovely little letter in the mail."

"I find it absolutely ridiculous that a U.S. citizen is being asked to jump through additional hoops to exercise a right to vote," said the registered Democrat, a South African immigrant who became a U.S. citizen in 2010. "I think you're chasing people that don't need to be chased."

A total of 1,566 letters went to Democrats and 1,794 went to unaffiliated voters. Another 486 letters were sent to Republicans.

Using information from the department of motor vehicles, Gessler identified people who once presented documents showing they were not citizens, such as a green card, when applying for a driver's license. It's unclear whether those people registered to vote while getting a driver's license or when approached by someone as part of registration drive.

Gessler's office provided The Associated Press with the party affiliation of people who received the letters but denied a request to see their names, citing an ongoing investigation.

Democrats and voting advocacy groups said Gessler has shown no proof of widespread fraud and overreached by sending the letters.

"They basically sent out the functional equivalent of an email blast," said Mark Grueskin, an attorney who represents Democrats on election issues.

The American Civil Liberties Union in Colorado said at least 25 eligible voters who got the letters have contacted the organization, and the number is growing.

Democrats do not want Gessler to hold hearings for the fewer than 200 remaining people whose citizenship status hasn't been verified on the federal immigration database. They say further hearings are unnecessary because county clerks already have the power to handle challenges to voter registrations.

If Gessler's plan to hold hearings is approved by his office, people could start receiving a new round of letters as soon as next week notifying them that their citizenship is in doubt.

Deputy Secretary of State Suzanne Staiert said the goal is to keep accurate voter rolls, and that officials are working in the best interest of immigrants who may be unaware that they're breaking the law by being registered to vote or by voting.

"I understand that you think this is a very small percentage," she told opponents of the plan, "but for these people, this is their life."

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Florida now using federal data to cull voter rolls

TALLAHASSEE, FLA. -- Florida election officials began sorting through the names of potentially ineligible voters yesterday after reaching agreement with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to use the federal immigration database. Florida election officials have been aggressively seeking to scan voter rolls for noncitizens and other ineligible voters. Republican Gov. Rick Scott has defended the move in the face of criticism from Democrats and civil-rights groups who say it is unnecessary and aimed at assuaging unfounded Republican fears that many illegal aliens are on voting rolls.

— From wire reports
'Joe the Plumber': U.S. should build a fence on the Mexican border and 'start shooting'

Published: Monday, August 13, 2012, 6:00 PM   Updated: Monday, August 13, 2012, 9:09 PM

By

Sabrina Eaton, The Plain Dealer

Ohio Republican congressional candidate Samuel "Joe the Plumber" Wurzelbacher plunged into controversy this weekend in Arizona by delivering speeches where he said the United States needs to build a fence along the Mexican border and "start shooting."

At a Prescott, Arizona fundraiser for Arizona State Sen. Lori Klein, Wurzelbacher applauded Klein's stance against illegal immigration as he denounced political correctness.

"We're afraid to say anything because we are afraid someone will report it on the 5 o'clock news," said Wurzelbacher, of Holland. "For years, I've said put a damned fence on the border going to Mexico and start shooting. I am running for Congress and that should be a bad thing to say. You know what? It's how I feel. I am not going to hide it because I am running for an office. I want my borders protected and I am very, very adamant about that."

Controversial Maricopa County Sheriff Joe Arpaio, who is known for his crusades against illegal immigration, also spoke at the fundraiser for Klein.

Wurzelbacher explored the illegal immigration theme again at a Patriot Rally in Arizona, where he suggested: "Put troops on the border and start shooting. I bet that solves our illegal immigration problem real quick."

"It's a scary world out there, and I always feel a lot damned better when I got my .45 in my hand," Wurzelbacher told the group.

Both of Wurzelbacher's speeches were posted on the Internet by Prescottnews.com

Wurzelbacher's remarks were denounced by the Arizona Democratic Party, which issued a statement that said they provided "another black eye for Arizona."
Wurzelbacher's rival for a congressional seat that stretches between Cleveland and Toledo, Toledo Democratic Rep. Marcy Kaptur, issued a press release that said his comments "have no place in a civil society."

"A Member of Congress is sworn to uphold the Constitution, not to take the law into his own hands," said the statement from Kaptur. "He should take back his words and apologize to everyone who respects life, the Constitution and the rule of law."

Wurzelbacher spokesman Phil Christofanelli said the candidate understands that people want to come to the United States because "it's the greatest country on Earth," and that its laws need to be enforced so it can remain the greatest country on Earth.

"As a Congressman, Joe would empower the federal government to do whatever it takes to secure our borders," said Christofanelli. "He believes that border security agents, like every law enforcement officer, should be permitted to use force when necessary in order to protect themselves and to prevent American laws from being violated."

Given the fact that Kaptur's campaign is heavily funded by labor unions, Christofanelli said "you would think she would care more about preserving American jobs."

Wurzelbacher spent Monday in Wisconsin, where he was campaigning on behalf of former Gov. Tommy Thompson's GOP bid for U.S. Senate. He told Patch.com that his wife hails from Wisconsin and he hopes to move his family to its north woods "in the next couple of years, provided he can find a job."
Ohio Secretary of State Jon Husted asks feds for immigration database for voters' citizenship verification

Published: Thursday, July 19, 2012, 6:35 PM    Updated: Friday, July 20, 2012, 8:17 AM

By Joe Guillen, The Plain Dealer

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Ohio has requested access to a massive federal immigration database so election officials can verify voters' citizenship.

Republican Secretary of State Jon Husted acknowledged the sensitivity of immigration issues but said the information, which he requested, would be valuable in unique situations when a voter's citizenship is called into question. The database would not be used on a widespread basis to purge Ohio's voter rolls of non-citizens, he said.

"I feel like I have an obligation to pursue this to make sure we have all the tools necessary to make sure the integrity of the election system is upheld," Husted said.

Husted's request comes at a volatile time. The hotly contested presidential election has put a spotlight on voting rights issues across the country, and there already have been accusations in Ohio of voter suppression tactics by GOP lawmakers aimed at poor and minority voters. Just this week, President Barack Obama's re-election team sued Husted to allow in-person voting the three days before Election Day.

Voting rights advocates cautioned Husted to use the information carefully.

"There are likely to be many mistakes in any huge database and voters should not be denied the right to vote due to some bureaucrat's technical error," said Dan Tokaji, a professor at Ohio State University's Moritz College of Law and an expert on election law and voting rights issues.

The database, known as Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlement, or the SAVE program, contains about 100 million records that are available to benefit-granting agencies to determine an applicant's immigration status. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security oversees the program.

Husted asked for access to the records in late May after discussing the issue with other secretaries of state.

His request coincided with a legal battle over Florida's request for access. The U.S. Department of Justice fought to
deny Florida access to the immigration database. But the Department of Homeland Security decided to grant Florida access after a federal judge ruled that Florida could remove non-citizens from its voter rolls.

Ohio is among about a dozen states that have requested the information.

But state Sen. Nina Turner, a Cleveland Democrat, questioned whether there is a problem with immigrants voting. She said it's unlikely non-residents would put themselves at risk by casting a ballot.

"It's just a red herring as far as I'm concerned," she said.

Husted said Ohio does not have a widespread problem of non-residents casting ballots. But such issues could arise in a presidential election year, when political parties and other groups are trying to get as many supporters to the polls as possible.

"From time to time, as we near the election and so forth, you'll get circumstances when a voter's eligibility is unknown or questioned," he said. "Up until this point, we'd have no way to accurately determine someone's citizenship."

Husted said the database would be used if a local elections board, a political party or an individual challenged a voter's citizenship. He said personal knowledge could be the basis for such a challenge.

A board of elections would report incidents to the secretary of state's office, which would then verify citizenship, Husted said.

State Rep. Kathleen Clyde, a Democrat from Kent who has been outspoken on voting rights, said the secretary of state should be more focused on making voting accessible to all Ohio citizens.

"Databases are flawed, and I am concerned that any wholesale effort to remove people from voting lists will prevent legitimate voters from exercising this most sacred right," she said in an e-mail.

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U.S. citizen held as illegal immigrant sues

Published: Friday, July 06, 2012, 9:43 PM   Updated: Friday, July 06, 2012, 9:46 PM

By McClatchy-Tribune News Service

Washington -- A computer specialist is suing the FBI and the Department of Homeland Security after a controversial fingerprint-sharing program incorrectly identified him as an illegal immigrant and authorities ordered him detained in a maximum-security prison.

The lawsuit is the first legal challenge by a U.S. citizen to the Secure Communities program, which the Obama administration has expanded nationwide over the objections of immigration advocacy groups and Democratic governors in Illinois, New York and Massachusetts.

Under the program, fingerprints obtained when local authorities arrest a suspect are automatically checked against immigration databases as well as FBI criminal databases. U.S. immigration agents are notified if the results indicate an immigration violation.

When James Makowski, a Chicago-area resident who repairs computer networks for companies, pleaded guilty in December 2010 to a felony charge of selling heroin, he was sentenced to four months at a "boot camp" drug treatment program, according to DuPage County, Ill., court records.

But when the fingerprint search flagged Makowski as an illegal immigrant, he was held for two months in the maximum-security prison in Pontiac, Ill., before immigration officials acknowledged the error and canceled the detention order. He later completed the four-month drug rehabilitation program and was released.

Makowski was born in India and adopted by an American family in New Jersey when he was 4 months old. The family later moved to Illinois. Makowski became a naturalized U.S. citizen at age 1, but the government did not update his immigration records, according to his lawyer, Mark Fleming.

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Controversial lawyer Michael Hethmon debates immigration policy at Cleveland State University

Published: Saturday, May 12, 2012, 5:15 AM

By

CLEVELAND, Ohio — Michael Hethmon, a controversial voice in immigration policy, sparred Friday in Cleveland with lawyers about his idea of dealing with undocumented immigrants: He believes in making their lives "so inhospitable" that they'll pack up and leave the country.

"By making the environment for illegal aliens so inhospitable, especially in economic terms -- if you can't get a job, can't pay rent -- then maybe it's not the good deal it's cracked up to be," Hethmon said after a debate at Cleveland State University's Cleveland-Marshall College of Law.

Hethmon, who offered assistance in the writing of the controversial Arizona law that last month went before the U.S. Supreme Court, said there is a groundswell of support for tough laws that make life difficult for undocumented immigrants. His critics say Hethmon's views offer no viable policy solution to the broken immigration system.

He spoke at a program presented by the Cleveland Metropolitan Bar Association and Cleveland-Marshall. U.S. Attorney Steven Dettelbach moderated it, and about 125 Cleveland lawyers and judges attended.

Hethmon sat on a panel with Cleveland immigration attorney Michael Rendon, who opposes Hethmon's views. He said he feared innocent citizens would be hauled in by law enforcement in attempts to rid the country of undocumented immigrants.

Rendon, a former Immigration and Customs Enforcement agent, said Hispanics would face harassment, based solely on the color of their skin. He said Hethmon deals solely in theory, as "he never had to make a traffic stop along the border. He doesn't know what that's like."

"Latinos are going to be stopped more often for a lane change and a broken light than Anglos," Rendon said during
the debate. "That's not right."

The crowd agreed with Rendon's comments, breaking out in applause.

As immigration reform forges into the presidential race, Hethmon's views are part of a much larger debate on how the country should deal with the issue. His critics say his views are on the extreme fringe.

Hethmon is the general counsel and director of the Immigration Reform Law Institute, which opposes undocumented immigrants and the people who hire them. It is a supporting group to the Federation for American Immigration Reform, an organization the Southern Poverty Law Center lists as an extremist group.

The Washington Post reported last month that Hethmon and associate Kris Kobach have helped six states and a handful of cities and counties "write tough legislation that allows local police or bureaucrats to crack down on illegal immigrants."

When questioned by a person in the audience about polls showing that a majority of people do not support his immigration policy, Hethmon scoffed.

He said polls don't accurately reflect the views of Americans.

"Below the surface, there's a very popular sentiment," he said.

David Leopold, an immigration attorney in Cleveland and the immediate past president of the American Immigration Lawyers Association, said he wasn't so sure.

"What they're talking about here is ethnic cleansing," Leopold said. "They want to make it so bad for people that they'll just leave. Not only is that an unworkable solution, it's inhumane."

He said that what's needed is an immigration policy that is "safe, orderly and fair. Mass deportations and round-ups don't get us to that."

Hethmon's website for an unsuccessful run for public office in Maryland praises his work in crafting the state law for Arizona, saying he helped police and a bloc of congressional members "stand up to left-wing crazies."

The issues in Arizona emerged again Thursday, when the U.S. Justice Department filed a lawsuit that said Maricopa County Sheriff Joe Arpaio took part in a pattern of discriminating police conduct directed at Latinos, according to the suit.

The suit says Arpaio's office has engaged in large-scale sweeps of Latinos in an attempt to attack the issue of undocumented immigrants. Arpaio told The New York Times that he's office is attempting to enforce federal immigration laws.

The Washington Post reported that the laws Hethmon and Kobach helped cities such as Hazleton, Pa., create have helped redraw "an underground nation." It said undocumented immigrants have quickly realized where it is safe to
live and where it isn't.

Rendon said the losers are farmers, who can't find people to help harvest farm fields.

"To say that someone will leave the country is nonsense," Rendon said. "They'll just move to another state."

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Ohio lawmaker wants to bring Arizona-style immigration law north

Published: Friday, July 16, 2010, 10:30 PM    Updated: Saturday, July 17, 2010, 7:08 AM

By

Robert L. Smith, The Plain Dealer

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- The immigration issues rolling Arizona came to Cleveland on Friday, stoking passionate discussion, and probably not for the last time.

A forum at the City Club of Cleveland introduced State Rep. Courtney Combs, a downstate Republican who is calling for an Arizona-like crackdown on illegal immigrants in Ohio.

Combs declared illegal immigration a national menace and said states must step in where federal authorities are slow to tread.

His campaign -- yet to reach Northeast Ohio -- might be gaining steam around the state. A poll last month found strong support among Ohioans for an anti-illegal immigrant law.

"I wish the states didn't have to do this, that the federal government would do its job," Combs told a City Club audience.

But with migrants streaming across the Mexican border, many of them drug smugglers and human traffickers, according to Combs, states need to join the fight.

That viewpoint alarmed and bewildered his co-panelists: local immigration lawyers Margaret Wong and Richard Herman and the Rev. Stanley Miller, the executive director of the Cleveland NAACP.

Ohio is far from the Mexican border, and no one seems worried about illegal immigrants from Canada, Wong said.

"What does a border state and their drugs and their ranches have to do with the
Midwest?" she asked.

Northeast Ohio desperately needs immigrants, Wong added, and Combs seems intent on scaring them away.

"We do need immigrants. I have no problem with that at all," Combs said. "I do have a problem with who is coming, and why."

The debate, while touching on disparate American experiences, also illustrated two Ohios.

Immigrants make up 14 percent of the population in Arizona, a border state that may be home to more than half a million illegal immigrants. In contrast, only 3 percent of Ohioans are foreign-born, and experts estimate less than 1 percent of the state’s 11 million people are here illegally.

In Northeast Ohio, an illegal immigrant is as likely to be an international student who overstayed her visa as a farmworker from Mexico.

Combs, who lives in Butler County, a growing bedroom suburb of Cincinnati, sees a different, more Arizona-like Ohio.

A pre-recession housing boom drew hundreds of Mexican laborers to the overwhelmingly white county and to its major city, Hamilton. The newcomers found work in a non-union housing industry. They infuriated established residents as they competed for jobs, raised rents and taxed social services and safety forces.

At the City Club, Combs accused illegal immigrants of being involved in drug dealing and home invasions in Hamilton.

He and Butler County Sheriff Richard K. Jones have emerged as two of Ohio’s harshest critics of illegal immigration. The pair traveled to the Mexican border in May on a fact-finding mission. They are pushing for a state referendum to impose an Arizona-like immigration law and hope to get it on the ballot next year.

"I’ve walked the border. I’ve talked to the ranchers. I’ve seen the problems," Combs told the City Club.

Arizona’s Impending law requires local police, while enforcing other laws, to question a person’s immigration status if they suspect that person is in the country illegally.

Traditionally, immigration enforcement is a federal responsibility, and the U.S. Justice Department is challenging the Arizona law as unconstitutional, seeking to block it before it takes effect July 29. But it’s an idea gaining traction.

Twenty states are pursuing similar laws, Combs said, and Ohio is listening.

Last month, a Quinnipiac University poll found that 45 percent of Ohioans would support a law similar to Arizona’s while 35 percent would oppose it and 20 percent are unsure.
The margin narrowed on the question of whether such a law would lead to discrimination against Hispanics: 43 percent said it would not and 40 percent said it would.

The NAACP's Miller said he does not see how discrimination could be avoided, maybe most unfairly in Northeast Ohio, where an illegal immigrant is as likely to be European or Asian as Latino.

He warned of a "slippery slope" leading to new racial profiling and prejudice.

"Really, it's a huge class issue," Miller said. Nobody wants to stop the Asian scientist, he said: "It's that person coming across the border with two children to try to get a better life."

He and other panelists called for comprehensive immigration reform that would address myriad issues by updating an antiquated immigration system.

Combs said there is only one issue commanding his attention.

"You can't change the process until you change the way people are coming here," he said. "I want to know who you are."

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Ohio Senate votes to toughen immigration law enforcement

By Laura A. Bischoff
Columbus Bureau

COLUMBUS — Taking aim at undocumented foreign workers, Senate Republicans on Wednesday, March 24, voted for a pair of bills that give local police and sheriffs a greater role in enforcing federal immigration laws.

The Senate voted largely along party lines 21-11 in favor of a bill sponsored that directs the state attorney general to seek an agreement with federal officials to allow specially-trained local police and sheriffs to enforce federal immigration laws.

State Sen. Jimmy Stewart, R-Athens, said the bill would give Ohio the ability to address a growing problem while the federal government does little to fix the immigration system.

State Sen. Sue Morano, D-Lorain, opposed the bill, saying sheriffs' departments are already too busy handling current responsibilities such as checking on sex offenders.

"This state is made up of immigrants. We should not forget this at all. Unfortunately, the hysteria over immigration is nothing new," she said.

State Sen. Bill Seitz, R-Cincinnati, said the bill allows local police to work with federal authorities but does not require it. The program also provides training, he said.

The second immigration bill, sponsored by state Sen. Gary Cates, R-West Chester, passed 22-10, also largely along party lines. Cates' bill would authorize county sheriffs to help federal officials investigate and detain violators of immigration laws when federal authorities ask for assistance.

David Leopold, a Cleveland attorney and president-elect of the American Immigration Lawyers Association, called both bills political grandstanding that will do nothing to make Ohio safer or fix the country's broken immigration system. He said states that have gotten into the immigration enforcement business have found themselves swamped with costs.

"Rather than running around and arresting undocumented workers, they ought to be running around and really looking carefully at the employers who are not following the law," Leopold said.

It is unclear how many undocumented immigrant workers are in Ohio.

Both bills now move to the Ohio House for consideration.

More News