

OP-ED: Why L.A. Should Boycott Arizona

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Los Angeles, CA - While pledging my allegiance to the American flag at a recent chamber meeting, it dawned on me that in Arizona "justice and liberty" excludes my children and me.

Arizona's leaders seek to placate its citizens by beating out current economic and security concerns with a piñata filled with Latin Americans. This solution to illegal immigration, SB 1070, will not erase those problems. Moreover, this law turns a blind eye to one of our nation's founding principles, which gives anyone who comes here legally the right to live freely and be treated equally. It violates the civil rights granted to each citizen by the U.S. Constitution.

Gov. Jan Brewer, Sen. John McCain, Sheriff Joe Arpaio and other elected officials contend that the new law helps reduce illegal immigration by allowing police to stop and question suspect individuals about their immigration status. But what information will a police officer be gathering to ascertain a person's right to be in the United States?

Do you believe police will be approaching white, English-speaking immigrants from Canada or the United Kingdom to check their visa or green card status? No, this law targets Spanish-speaking residents with mestizo and Native American features. Many of Arizona's longtime citizens fit that description. In executing this law, police will violate those Americans' constitutionally guaranteed rights.

The territories in the American Southwest were annexed to the United States in 1848, at the end of the Mexican-American War. Before the war, the region was a Mexican territory, governed and settled by Mexicans.

No evidence

Arizona's elected officials also claimed that illegal immigrants are responsible for the increase in heinous crimes that are plaguing the state. Yet, there is no evidence to support these claims. Data gathered at the Disaster Center and the Bureau of Justice Statistics show that crime and violent crime rates in Arizona, and other border states, have been steadily declining since 1995.

These politicians are using racial tensions to bolster support and push agendas that will hurt more than the Latinos living in Arizona. That state's answer to illegal immigration is discriminatory, ill-conceived and paves the way for greater civil rights abuses in the future.

Yet this law has also brought Americans together.

People across the nation are speaking out against the recent actions in Arizona. In California, Rep. Joe Baca (D) is boycotting Arizona. Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, Shakira and Vanessa Laine (Kobe Bryant's spouse)

have joined with the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund, MALDEF, Latino activists and other Americans to test and kill this uncivil law.

If this law is upheld, it will become a cancer that can target other people of color and that threatens to erase decades of civil rights gains in this country.

As a business owner in Los Angeles and Washington DC, I salute the business boycott of Arizona issued by our City Council members. Recently awarded Arizona contracts should be rebid and awarded to local businesses. The economic incentive and moral position would be beneficial in unifying local communities. It would also demonstrate the strength of our diversity, if greater Metropolitan Area the governments agencies would also boycott Arizona.

I urge all USA businesses to stop doing business with Arizona. If Arizona wants apartheid, let it stand alone in its choice. Those Arizona companies who do not support the legislation need our help. We need to provide external pressure to change local minds.

Furthermore, the short- and long-term consequences of this law on Arizona's Latino community are likely to be severe. Arizona political and business leaders need to be encouraged to support and rebuild pride and dignity in its Latino base.

The rest of us also need to be vigilant in our efforts to protect our civil rights and expose the shameful underpinnings of Arizona's new law. We need to educate our communities and other peoples of color about their civil rights, celebrate our cultures and Boycott Arizona. Stay in MD/VA/DC this summer for your vacation.

Why should you care? America's diversity is not defined by clear divides. Every American's cultural identity is a patchwork of friends and family with different interests, beliefs and traditions. You may have served with a fellow Latino in the Army. Your best friend, spouse or mentor may have Latin American roots.

Latinos are strong, integral parts of our economy and our identity at local, state and national levels. Of the 45 million U.S. Latinos, 1 million are in MD/VA and DC. And each year, these local residents spend upwards of \$22 billion. According to Synovate Diversity's 2006 U.S. Diversity Markets Report, Latinos' significant buying power in this country is close to \$1 trillion, and that power is growing.

Sending a message

Action is required. Send a strong message that stops other states from establishing laws similar to the one passed in Arizona. Support organizations like the ACLU that are helping those being subjected to demeaning searches file state and federal lawsuits. Drive national awareness so that President Obama and other government officials have the support to respond more aggressively. This is more imperative in light of Arizona's threat to cut off water to California and electricity. Rather to reflect on its injustice, Arizona is driving itself into isolation.

The state of Arizona cannot be allowed to target one group as a means of placating another. We cannot afford to wipe our hands of the affair. If we let this civil rights abuse go unnoticed, more rights will fall away and real solutions will not be found to keep this country strong and proud.

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