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## The Star's editorial | Supreme Court rules wisely on immigration, juveniles

The U.S. Supreme Court on Monday correctly rejected the notion proposed by Kansas Secretary of State Kris Kobach and others that states can supersede the federal government and impose harsh crackdowns on immigrants.

But in a day of landmark decisions — though not the anxiously awaited one on President Barack Obama's health care law — the court also reinforced the wrongheaded notion that unlimited campaign contributions from corporations, unions and anonymous individual donors should be allowed to pollute our nation's political process.

In a third case, a majority of justices correctly respected the precedent that juvenile offenders should not be subjected to the same sentencing considerations as adults, even for the most heinous of crimes. The court said that juveniles could not be sentenced to life without parole.

Despite the discouraging campaign finance ruling, the decision on immigration, especially, may help put the brakes on growing concerns that the Roberts Court is as likely to heed conservative talking points as legal precedents. The seminal test is the ruling on the Affordable Care Act, which is expected on Thursday.

Show me your papers

The court's long-awaited decision on Arizona's immigration law vindicates a challenge by the Obama administration in three important areas.

Arizona cannot make it a crime for immigrants to be without identification papers showing they are in the country legally, the high court said. The state also can't make it a crime for undocumented immigrants to apply for a job. And officials can't arrest someone only because they suspect the person is in the state illegally.

The court let stand the law's noxious "show me your papers" provision, which requires law enforcement officers to try to verify a person's immigration status during a stop or arrest. This edict understandably has given rise to fears that whole groups of people will face a greater chance of being stopped on flimsy pretenses.

Justice Anthony Kennedy said more scrutiny from state and federal courts was needed to determine whether the provision is being enforced in a constitutional way.

Today's ruling should serve as an incentive for Congress to get serious about a realistic immigration policy. And it should help to convince states that they are wasting time, money and good will by listening to Kobach, a lawyer who continually wins the confidence of elected officials, despite a near consistent record of being slapped down by courts.

United in obstinance

By the same 5-4 majority that inflicted the "Citizens United" ruling on America, the court passed up an opportunity to correct the mistake.

Instead, the justices summarily upended a 100-year-old Montana law that bans corporations from making political contributions.

Justice Stephen Breyer correctly protested in a dissent that "Montana's experience, like considerable experience elsewhere ... casts grave doubt on the court's supposition that independent expenditures do not corrupt or appear to do so."

But the four conservative justices and the court's middleman, Kennedy, stuck with that contention.

The conservative majority was wrong before and it is wrong now. Citizens United is responsible for the proliferation of the SuperPACs, which spend unlimited sums from anonymous donors, mostly on vicious attack ads.

There is still some hope the court will take up the question of the silent money. But Monday's action on the Montana law will surely mean a brutal election cycle.

5-4 for compassion

The court helped build a fairer, more compassionate society with its 5-4 ruling that will stop courts from sentencing juvenile offenders to life in prison without a chance of parole.

The decision, written by Justice Elena Kagan, builds upon previous rulings banning death sentences for juveniles and life sentences for young people convicted of crimes other than homicides.

“Mandatory life without parole for a juvenile precludes consideration of his chronological age and its hallmark features — among them, immaturity, impetuosity, and failure to appreciate risks and consequences,” Kagan wrote. “It prevents taking into account the family and home environment...”

The decision doesn't mean that juveniles who commit the most serious crimes should escape justice. But it correctly rejects the notion that lives at 14 or 15 years of age are beyond redemption.

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