



## Editorial: A law Alabama doesn't need

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By **Mike Hollis, The Huntsville Times**

Forcing the federal government to deal effectively with illegal immigration might be the only good thing that could come of hard-line measures taken by some states and being proposed in others, including Alabama.

Thursday night, the state Senate passed a rewritten immigration bill that would make it a crime for an illegal immigrant just to be in Alabama. The bill provides for a \$100 fine and 30 days in jail for a person who does not have valid federal alien registration or other proof of legal residence in Alabama.

This is one of several measures in a bill that aims to keep illegal immigrants out of Alabama by making just their very efforts to survive a crime. One section of the bill would make it a crime punishable by a fine of up to \$500 for an illegal alien to "knowingly apply for work, solicit work in a public or private place or perform work as an employee or independent contractor."

As introduced by Rep. Mickey Hammon, R-Decatur, and Sen. Scott Beason, R-Gardendale, this legislation is mean-spirited and sounds far more like it is driven by anger than sound reasoning. Each proposed nearly identical bills, and the one passed by the Senate was a version of Hammon's House Bill 56. To reconcile the differences, the House and Senate may each appoint three members to write a compromise version both houses could support.

But there is little or nothing in either bill worth keeping. One provision would require police to demand proof of citizenship or residency from anyone they stop for a traffic violation if they have reasonable suspicion the person is in the United States illegally. This would invite racial profiling, a practice that creates mistrust and suspicion among those who are here legally.

Beason says officers can't just pull motorists over at random. But police officers are trained to spot all sorts of relatively minor problems that allow them to pull people over. Does your car have a license plate bracket that covers the decals on your tag? How many times have you failed to stop completely at a stop sign?

Some of Huntsville best-known and most successful business leaders are Hispanic. Many other Hispanics who live here and elsewhere in Alabama are highly educated professionals. Others may not hold degrees but are legally here, too, nonetheless. And under this bill, all of them face the prospect of being pulled over in Alabama because of the color of their skin.

Another provision would allow the Department of Homeland Security to start hiring police officers, a step Beason says is necessary for proper coordination. Sen. Paul Sanford, R-Huntsville, calls that "the dawn of big government Republicanism." Sanford narrowly lost a vote in the Senate to take that out of the bill.

Alabama already has the Alabama Bureau of Investigation, state troopers, game wardens in the woods, a sheriff's department in every county and a police chief at every good-sized country cross roads. If anything, Alabama does need more state troopers and correctional officers, but we don't need Homeland Security police or our own immigration agency. And just what does illegal immigration really have to do with Homeland Security, anyway?

Beason and others are also using the state's high unemployment rate as an argument to support his bill. "There are thousands and thousands of jobs Alabamians could hold if they were not displaced by this illegal work force," he said, according to the Associated Press.

Indeed, more than 195,000 Alabamians were looking for work in March, although many of them probably would just as soon not lay concrete blocks, clean up restrooms and cut up chickens. Many Hispanics have been put out of work, too.

People are rightly concerned about illegal immigration and the failure of the federal government to enforce immigration laws. This is a truly serious problem, but it's not Alabama's place to create an immigration law enforcement agency or write laws that would make it a crime to take an illegal immigrant to the grocery store or the doctor's office.

Truly, we are better people than that.

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