

I recently attended the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops conference on immigration held in Salt Lake City. Much of the conference focused on the anti-immigration law passed in Alabama. Alabama's HB56 is the harshest anti-immigration law in the nation and has touched off a humanitarian crisis, a civil rights crisis and an economic crisis. Families are fleeing the state, kids are afraid to go to school, people are scared to leave their homes, and people are being denied basic services such as water, in some communities, unless they have an Alabama Driver's license.

Employers are up in arms, crops are rotting in the fields, and law enforcement is upset. One provision of HB56 forced teachers and school administrators to check the immigration status of not only new students but their parents as well. The 11<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court ruled on October 14 that Alabama had to temporarily stop enforcing this provision; however it was in full effect over two weeks of classes and is still part of the Alabama law. All of these children are constitutionally guaranteed a right to an education and many of them are native-born U.S. citizens whose parents happen to be undocumented.

Many Hispanic families are fleeing the state driving off in the middle of the night. Hispanic neighborhoods are being vacated, tearful goodbyes being said. Those who dare to stay are desperately seeking "power of attorney" agreements, so that if they are arrested, detained and deported their citizen children can be taken care of by loved ones. And the law's champions are delighted. They say everything is going according to plan. When POLITICO asked Republican Congressman Mo Brooks of Alabama about "unintended consequence of HB56, like the mass absences of his state's Hispanic children," Brooks replied; "Those are the intended consequences of Alabama's legislation with respect to illegal aliens. We don't have the money in America to keep paying for the education of everybody else's children from around the world" Kansas Attorney General Kris Kobach, one of the architects of Alabama's and Arizona's SB 1070, told a conference that driving Hispanics out of state was just an efficient way to enforce the law.

Meanwhile framers and business owners are facing disaster. Business owners are watching their Hispanic and immigrant workforce disappear, not only undocumented immigrants, but legal immigrants as well. The Associated General Contractors of Alabama estimate that about one-fourth of the entire construction work force has already left the state. The agriculture industry is faring even worse; one farmer told CBS news that the labor shortage would cost his family around \$150,000 this year. Shortly after HB56 went into effect, according to the Associated Press, fifty desperate Alabama farmers met with one of the law's sponsors, Rep Scott Benson. When he dismissed their complaints, and told them "the law will be in effect this entire growing season" and that he would advocate for federal guest worker visas for the next season, one farmer replied, "There won't be no next growing season."

Is this acceptable? Is this America? Wouldn't it be better for everyone if we help to transform our cities and towns into welcoming communities? Today's immigrants come from as close as Mexico and as far away as Somalia, Russia and China. Immigrant and refugee integration is a two-way process where newcomers and Utah residents work together to create stronger and diverse neighborhoods.

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