

F R U M 4 1 1

Engaging Arizona's Leaders

ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION VS. FISCAL CRISIS: Passions Clash Over Arizona's Political Landscape



“The cool and deliberate sense of the community ought to... ultimately prevail over the views of its rulers.”

--James Madison, The Federalist, No. 63

“Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them.”

--David Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature



These wise but contradictory edicts reflect an eternal tension at the core of political life: The struggle between reason and emotion. Between the head and the heart. While Madison and Hume had 18th-century issues in mind, they could also have been talking about Arizona politics in 2010, where the dispute over illegal immigration exploded like a bomb over the state’s political landscape and for much of the year laid waste to efforts to resolve other urgent Arizona issues. Senate Bill 1070’s passage launched a high-decibel national debate, hurled Governor Jan Brewer onto the national stage, provoked a lawsuit from the U.S. Justice Department, prompted boycotts and protests, and injected extra vigor, vinegar and venom into the state’s already harsh public discourse.

Immigration so dominated Arizona’s public conversation that it seemed to drown out nearly everything else. And for good reason: Sustained, large-scale illegal immigration into and through Arizona clearly raises grave public policy issues. Estimates of its specific impacts on Arizona vary widely, but simple cause-and-effect logic dictates that an unprecedented influx of millions of people undoubtedly would result in challenges for Arizona – compounded by the fact the federal government, charged with managing immigration, has failed to do its job. Not surprisingly many Arizonans, feeling abandoned on the front lines as an entryway border state, grew increasingly angry, frightened and frustrated. As the primary election rolled around, voters gravitated toward candidates whose campaigns focused on such topics as “anchor babies” and border fences rather than more traditional political issues such as jobs, taxation and education – presumably key issues for a state hit so hard by the Great Recession.

“Bad officials are elected by good citizens who do not vote.”

-- George Jean Nathan

That was then, this is now

Immigration issues may have been a political driver in the summertime primary season – who can forget U.S. Senator John McCain’s “complete the dang fence” commercials in his GOP primary? – but in this fall’s general election, SB 1070 has taken a temporary backseat, due in no small part by being put on hold by a federal court. Campaign literature, signs, advertisement and TV commercials of many Arizona candidates still espouse their backing of strict enforcement of immigration laws, but with nowhere near the vitriol experienced in the first half of this year. For the time being at least, political attention has shifted to Arizona’s fiscal house. That’s what happens when alarming headlines not only land on the driveway but also hit home. Arizona remains in the grip of its greatest fiscal crisis in decades, and most Arizonans – employers and employees alike – are feeling it through high unemployment, plummet-

WHAT ABOUT JOBS?

THE NON-PROFIT CENTER FOR THE FUTURE OF ARIZONA HELD TOWN MEETINGS IN JUNE WHERE CITIZENS SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES. THIS AND FOLLOWING LISTS INCLUDE SOME OF THEM, EDITED FOR SPACE.

- HOW VALUABLE ARE INCENTIVES FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT?
- HOW WOULD YOU FOSTER COLLABORATION BETWEEN EDUCATION AND INDUSTRY TO GENERATE MORE JOBS AND BETTER EMPLOYEES?
- WHAT WILL YOU DO TO CREATE GREEN JOBS FOR ARIZONA?
- HOW WILL YOU HELP THE SMALL BUSINESS OWNER CREATE JOBS?
- WHAT WOULD YOU DO TO DIVERSIFY OUR BUSINESS BASE RATHER THAN WAITING FOR CONSTRUCTION AND TOURISM TO RECOVER?

ing home values, lagging retail sales and no strong recovery in sight. Consider a sampling of data recently prepared by the Joint Legislative Budget Committee (JLBC):¹

- Arizona has lost an estimated 364,500 jobs since December 2007.
- State revenues for the fiscal year that ended in June declined by 10.3% over the previous year, an unprecedented third consecutive year of decline.
- The state's Operating Fund Balance was negative in fiscal years 2009 and 2010, for the first time since the 1930s.
- The fiscal year 2011 "structural deficit"—the persistent gap between revenues and spending—is projected to be about \$2 billion.
- The structural deficit is expected to narrow to just above \$1 billion, then grow to nearly \$2 billion in 2014 when this year's 1-cent sales tax expires.
- If two November ballot propositions fail — one seeks to access funds now reserved for early childhood development, the other targets funds reserved for open-space preservation — an additional \$469 million will have to be found elsewhere to balance the current budget.
- Arizona's credit rating was recently downgraded for General Fund backed financing, due to "economic and financial weakness, structural imbalance and constitutional limits on raising revenues and reducing spending."

It is worth noting that these grim figures apply after several rounds of state budget cuts, and after a host of budgetary maneuvers and one-time funding sources have been exhausted. While Arizona is far from alone in being slammed by the national recession, it has been hit harder than most, due in large part to its heavy reliance on population growth and home construction, and likely faces years of high unemployment, low housing prices, stagnant growth and slashed public services.

Most economists agree that the depth and length of Arizona's ordeal is due in part to the structural budget deficit that can only be permanently fixed by carefully crafted legislation that could well include higher taxes — a highly emotional issue for many people. The national "tea party" movement began, in part, out a concern with taxes ("Taxed Enough Already"); 38 of Arizona's 90 lawmakers and Governor Brewer pledged not to raise taxes. Last May's special election in which voters approved a temporary 1-cent sales tax increase — expiring in 2014 — came only after a year of maneuvering and threats to education. Feelings aside, the budget arithmetic — perhaps the ultimate expression of rationality — is undeniable and seems unlikely to respond to passionate appeals. Numbers can be stripped down to the naked truth. Emotions, on the hand, are like layers of clothing, dressing a rhetorical argument in both shrill and frill to garner attention.

Reason vs. Emotion

Emotion has long played a prominent role in American politics. History is full of appeals to fear, anger and prejudice that have poisoned public discourse, divided communities and fueled violence. But emotion has also promoted unity and rallied support for such positive efforts as national defense, civil rights and disaster assistance. True, the view that rationality, not emotion, should guide our political actions has a long pedigree

HOW SHOULD WE CHOOSE LEADERS?

- DO YOU FAVOR A PRIMARY ELECTION WHERE ANYONE CAN VOTE AND THE GENERAL ELECTION IS A RUNOFF BETWEEN THE TOP TWO CANDIDATES?
- SHOULD VOTER-MANDATED PROGRAMS BE REVISITED PERIODICALLY AND REFERRED BACK TO VOTERS?
- DO YOU SUPPORT CHANGING OUR SECRETARY OF STATE TO A LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR?
- DO YOU SUPPORT TERM LIMITS?
- DO YOU SUPPORT A CREATING MORE COMPETITIVE ELECTION DISTRICTS?
- WILL YOU SUPPORT A CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION TO MODERNIZE STATE GOVERNMENT?



HOW CAN WE IMPROVE EDUCATION?

- IS PUBLIC EDUCATION THE MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE FOR STATE GOVERNMENT?
- WHAT LEVEL OF INVESTMENT WILL YOU SUPPORT IN HIGHER EDUCATION?
- HOW WOULD YOU ENSURE OUR STUDENTS RISE TO NATIONAL/INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS?
- WHAT SPECIFICALLY WILL YOU DO TO CHANGE EDUCATION IN ARIZONA?
- WILL YOU SUPPORT A P-20 EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM?



in scholarship, and was famously championed by celebrated thinkers such as Rene Descartes and John Stuart Mill. The modern version may best be illustrated by “rational choice theory,” which — in its pure form — treats individuals as “decision-making units” who use rational deliberation to “maximize well-defined utility functions.”²

On the other hand, emotionalism has not fared well among political philosophers. As one writer put it, emotion is often viewed by scholars as “mysterious, inarticulate, thoughtless, blind, impulsive, intractable, extreme, biased, and selfish.”³ Voting or otherwise acting on the basis of emotion has even been considered by some as a failure of true citizenship. Yet even the most disapproving philosophers acknowledge that emotionalism — hunches, “hot buttons,” traditions, intuition — will always figure prominently in human affairs. Arizona’s immigration furor bears that out.

This poses challenges in forming public policy, which typically arises within a framework of laws and procedures that rely heavily on pragmatism, reflection, compromise and the neutral evaluation of empirical data. Considered in this light, Arizonans’ fixation on illegal immigration has been excessive. While undocumented immigrants do increase costs and service demands for the state’s institutions, there seems little factual basis for blaming illegal immigration for all or even most of Arizona’s woes.⁴ Many undocumented Arizonans work — or did until the recession — and thus contribute to the state’s economy through their labor, consumption and tax payments. The importation of Mexican laborers is a long-accepted practice in the United States, dating back at least to a 1909 agreement between President William H. Taft and Mexican President Porfirio Diaz. Most economists today consider immigrant labor — legal or not — an important part of Arizona’s economy, comprising as much as 10% of the state’s workforce. And while it’s difficult to document, the flow of illegal entrants into the U.S. — though still high — likely peaked several years ago.⁵

A Lack of Evidence

Effective public policymaking is ideally based on evidence, while many of the alarms widely raised about illegal immigrants seem based on faulty evidence, highly contested evidence or no evidence. Immigrants’ overall economic impact on Arizona’s economy remains disputed; it’s probably safest to conclude, as one scholar recently has, that the impact, whether positive or negative, is likely to be relatively small.⁶ As for crime, border officials and other law enforcement authorities have repeatedly stated that the vast majority of undocumented immigrants have no connection to drug smuggling and are not criminals; crime, in fact, has been dropping in Arizona [See Arizona Indicators, www.arizonaindicators.org/pages/justice/vcrime.html]. It is true that illegal immigrants compete for certain jobs against low-skilled native-born workers, and likely depress these workers’ wages. This is a substantial issue that demands attention; but it’s worth remembering that the same cheap immigrant labor also benefits many Arizona employers.

Emotion Clouds Both Sides

Nor are opponents of SB1070 and other anti-immigrant measures innocent of emotional exaggeration. All democratic societies must operate according to rules, and usually operate best when these rules — including laws concerning entry — are followed. While illegal immigrants do bring benefits to Arizona, it strains credulity to argue that

the passage of millions of people into and through the state has no negative consequences. It is wise and humane to recognize the ambitions of immigrants seeking to join their families and find a better life, but it's hardly unreasonable for a country to carefully weigh the benefits of large-scale in-migration against the needs of its existing citizens. And critics of relaxed immigration laws raise substantial concerns about the creation of a permanent American underclass of poorly educated, low-wage workers who are highly vulnerable to exploitation, and whose presence suppresses wages at the low end of the labor market.⁷

Perhaps the most regrettable aspect of Arizona's immigration debate has been the crowding out of consideration of other serious issues facing the state. A strictly rational approach to governing would identify immigration as just one of a number of critical issues that Arizonans must address, including job creation, education, pollution, the prison system, water management, Clean Elections, trust land reform, term limits and unfunded mandates. These matters were raised in community meetings held this summer by the nonprofit Center for the Future of Arizona (see lists). They demonstrate that residents have many other issues of concern, whether rationally, emotionally or both.

Immigration issue to return

Illegal immigration is not going away soon, either as an issue or as a reality. For one thing, the estimated 400,000 undocumented immigrants remaining in Arizona are not likely to leave, especially as most of their children are U.S. citizens. For another, the federal court ruling that blocked implementation of most of SB1070 is just beginning the appeals process, one that could take years. Thirdly, when Arizona's economy does recover, it's certain that the demand for inexpensive labor will resume. Perhaps as important, many politicians don't want the issue of illegal immigration to go away. State Sen. Russell Pearce, the Mesa Republican credited as the architect of SB 1070, has vowed to introduce legislation in January to change the way children born in the United States to illegal immigrants are granted citizenship.⁸ Can legal challenges over Arizona's interpretation of the 14th Amendment be far behind, not to mention an additional round of intense media coverage, protests, boycotts, international scrutiny and non-stop debate?

Arizonans who worry aloud about the problems resulting from illegal immigration will continue to do so at the risk of being branded racists; those who express concerns about the treatment of undocumented residents will be accused of promoting "sanctuary." Indeed, Arizona's immigration turmoil provides a textbook example of the power of raw emotion in politics, and of the challenges this can present to public policymakers. Prevailing attitudes, however, cannot be ignored. A recent Morrison Institute/Knowledge Networks poll⁹ found that 81% of Arizonans approve of the law's requirement that people produce documents verifying their legal status — the very heart of the legislation blocked pending federal court action. This is a remarkable majority on an issue so controversial and — at least to some — so harsh.

But there may be hope for a kinder, gentler immigration discourse, if both sides can find their ways through the cloud of angry rhetoric. In his book, *The Sentimental Citizen*, George Marcus argues against the classic reason-emotion split, claiming that the use of reason in fact depends on emotion. Drawing on recent research in neuroscience, he says that emotion operates outside of our awareness to deal with tasks that



HOW TO PROTECT NATURAL RESOURCES?

- SHOULD THE WHOLE STATE HAVE TO COMPLY WITH THE 1980 GROUND-WATER MANAGEMENT ACT?
- SHOULD WE KEEP THE GROWING SMARTER PROGRAM, WHICH HELPS PROTECT NATURAL RESOURCES?
- WOULD YOU FAVOR GIVING THE STATE TRUST LAND DEPARTMENT MORE LATITUDE IN MANAGING THEIR LANDS?
- WHAT'S YOUR PLAN TO KEEP OUR STATE PARKS OPEN?
- HOW WILL YOU CONSIDER THE NEEDS OF SMALLER CITIES AND RURAL AREAS?



“clear the way” for reason to operate. Even anxiety can play a positive role, he argues, by alerting the brain to potentially threatening situations, thus evoking the conscious use of reason necessary to address such situations. “Sentimental” citizens—not hyper-rational “decision-making units”—are thus more capable of exercising keen political judgment.

How can this translate into effective action? First, Arizonans must remind themselves and each other of the many critical issues besides immigration that confront the state; indeed, they should demand that their political candidates address the whole range of important issues rather than focus on immigration. Second, Arizonans on both sides of the immigration debate should admit that they do agree on something — they agree that the immigration issue is of vital importance for Arizona and the nation, and thus deserves careful, sustained attention from everyone who cares about Arizona’s future.

They might then bring themselves to acknowledge the legitimacy of each other’s emotional concerns — even if they consider the others’ worries unfounded. Having agreed to disagree, they ideally could work together to seek reasonable compromises — the holy grail of any healthy democracy. We do, after all, drink from the same cup.

Such an ambitious agenda to succeed will require leaders who — without deserting their feelings and convictions — approach this incendiary issue in a calm and honest manner — much as James Madison or David Hume might do. Madison and Hume are long gone, but a few worthy successors just might be found on November’s ballot. Arizona might be wise to seek them out.

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County Recorder and Election Offices
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League of Women Voters—Arizona
www.lwvaz.org

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¹ Joint Legislative Budget Committee, *Monthly Fiscal Highlights*, August 2010, <http://www.azleg.gov/jlbc/budgetstatus082710.pdf>

² Steven L. Green, *Rational Choice Theory: An Overview*, Baylor University, 2002, <http://www.pdfhost.com/ebook/choice+theory/>

³ Cheryl Hall, *The Sentimental Citizen* (review essay), *Cambridge Journals*, September 2003 Vol. 1/No. 3, www.apsanet.org

⁴ For fuller discussions of these and related topics, see Morrison Institute for Public Policy, *Illegal Immigration: Perceptions and Realities*, 2010, www.morrisoninstitute.asu.edu

⁵ The Pew Hispanic Center estimated in September 2010 that the annual influx of undocumented immigrants to the U.S. dropped nearly two-thirds from the 2000-2005 period to the 2007-2009 period. See the report at www.pewhispanic.org.

⁶ Gordon Hanson, *The Economic Logic of Illegal Immigration*, Council on Foreign Relations, No. 26, 2007, www.cfr.org/content/publications

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ *The Arizona Republic*, Oct. 17, 2010

⁹ See more poll results at morrisoninstitute.asu.edu.