

Anti-immigration law sparks interest

NOGALES, Ariz. (AP) — From hard-scrabble little towns along Rio Grande bottomland to booming cities in desert mountains, Americans along the Mexican border are eyeing California's tough new anti-immigration law with envy.

Some observers had dismissed the popularity of Proposition 187 in California as mostly reflective of that state's particular problems: a sagging economy, overburdened schools and overflowing hospital emergency rooms.

But an Associated Press reporter who drove from Texas through New Mexico and Arizona the week after Californians approved the new law found plenty of non-Californians ready to blame illegal immigrants for their assorted ills.

Liberal or conservative, well-off or poor, regardless of whether they are white, black or Hispanic, residents resent their tax dollars being spent on "the wrong people," providing welfare, food stamps and other support to those they say don't belong here.

"Too many people are coming," Maria Cadena says in her native Spanish from behind the counter of her clothing shop in Fabens, Texas, pop. 5,200, a few miles south of El Paso. "Too many are on welfare."

Her sentiment was not universal. Others living along the 2,000-mile border fear a crack-down on illegals can only harden attitudes toward people with brown skin. Others fret that the Mexican customers they depend upon will boycott U.S. businesses.

So far, no state has formally proposed following California's lead, but Proposition 187 advocates say they've had feelers from states along the Mexican border and from Florida. More importantly, the anti-immigrant movement seems headed for Congress.

California Gov. Pete Wilson has suggested Congress adopt a federal version of Prop 187, and such key Republicans as U.S. Rep. Lamar Smith of Texas and Sen. Alan Simpson of Wyoming say they will include many of the California ideas in sweeping reform measures they'll introduce in January.

Still, Republicans are deeply divided over how far reform should go. William Bennett criticized Wilson last week for "scapegoating" immigrants, and Jack Kemp said strengthening the Border Patrol was a better idea than banning kids from school. Both for-

mer Cabinet secretaries are potential GOP presidential candidates for 1996.

Even supporters of a strong law, like Mrs. Cadena, often have deeply conflicting feelings, regarding the porous border as both economic opportunity and threat.

In rundown little Fabens, the Hispanic women who buy Mrs. Cadena's silk shirts embroidered with gold come from "dos lados" — both sides.

Mrs. Cadena's family comes from both sides, too. She was born 40 years ago in Juarez, just across the river, but she's lived in the United States 20 years, the last two as an American citizen. She speaks only Spanish, although she's taken several stabs at English lessons at the behest of her husband, Reynaldo, who is from Texas.

As she talks about Proposition 187, Mrs. Cadena flips casually between support and concern. She finds parts of the law mean-spirited, for instance. "Don't keep the children from school," she says. "That's not right."

Neither does she believe such laws will halt illegal crossings, not when immigrants are willing to take low-paying jobs cleaning homes, harvesting crops and caring for children.

Yet she remains adamant that "something must be done." When the contradiction is pointed out, she smiles, slightly embarrassed. But she doesn't back off.

"You're for it?" her teen-age son Luis, who has been half-heartedly following the conversation, asks suddenly in astonishment.

"Yes," she says firmly. "I'm for it."

So is Ted Jones, a retired fire department arson investigator who lives one state to the west and some miles removed from the bustling rhythms of the border.

Jones speaks of the resentment he feels when he sees Mexican women "with two carts of groceries paying with food stamps."

Jones admits he doesn't know how many illegal immigrants get government assistance. He's not sure if they pay taxes. He only grunts in disbelief when it's pointed out that federal food stamps and other programs are off-limits to illegal immigrants.

Gazing south across the desert toward the border some 30 miles away, he talks about his admiration for "the old Mexican deeply religious culture."

His wife's Spanish ancestors settled in Las

Cruces a century ago. He speaks Spanish himself. And he remembers the hitchhiker he and his brother picked up in Los Angeles, a migrant worker from Tijuana — and the welcome they received when they dropped him at a relative's house in central California.

None of that, however, changes his hope that New Mexico politicians will soon follow California's lead. "What they did there — it's about time," he says. "I sure hope the politicians here take a look at doing the same."

Words like that chill businessman Fred Johnson and Jose Canchola, mayor of Nogales, Ariz., a booming trading town on the mountainous international border.

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— TED JONES
New Mexico resident

Each day at the gleaming new crossing, with its wide roof hanging over several lanes of incoming and outgoing traffic, Canchola and Johnson see people from Nogales, Mexico, drive or walk across to shop in the stores of Nogales, Arizona. Each has a crossing card, and almost 9,000 Mexicans are on a waiting list for the right to spend money among merchants and McDonalds on the other side.

Johnson looks at Mexican women carrying new shoes and groceries south and trucks rumbling north laden with fruit, vegetables and electronics and sees all that's right with America's future.

"Trade is our future," he says. "Trade with places like Mexico is our economic hope." Yet he knows some people look at the border and see only what's wrong.

Mexican children often attend Nogales' public schools illegally, he acknowledges. Illegal immigrants convicted of crimes served their time in Arizona cells. It all costs taxpayers money, Johnson knows. And it makes them angry.

"It's a difficult question, we all know that," Johnson says.

Cries of discrimination erupt over future plans for rail lines

LOS ANGELES (AP) — American cities lavish more cash on comfortable commuter trains for affluent white suburbanites than on dingy, dilapidated buses and subways that cater mainly to minorities and poor people.

That is the volcanic core of an argument in the U.S. District Court in Los Angeles, where a racially charged lawsuit has blocked a bus fare increase in the country's second-most populous city for two bitter months.

The suit filed by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People is being closely watched by transit authorities, city planners and urban activists, who believe the LA case may be a precursor of more such battles in what promises to be an era of Republican austerity and shrinking pools of local cash.

Already, the 1995 federal budget calls for a nearly 12 percent cut in the amount of operating aid to local public transportation, which the transit industry says could mean more fare hikes and more service cuts electrified by arguments over race and class.

"Fare increases are never popular. But I think set against the backdrop of what happened in Los Angeles, they're taking on a new sense of urgency," said Chip Bishop, spokesman for the American Public Transit Association, the main transit lobby in Washington, D.C.

The argument that white people get a better ride on public transportation is as old as Rosa Parks' refusal to give up her seat in 1955.

But the LA case illustrates a

more modern conflict. Transit systems must convince affluent motorists to quit clogging roads and fouling air yet still provide transportation to people who cannot afford cars.

"Transit authorities are asked to serve the poor, clean up the environment, get cars off the street," said John Pucher, an urban planning expert at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, N.J. "They have about 20 different goals and some conflict."

The LA lawsuit, filed on behalf of low-income commuters by the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, accuses the Metropolitan Transit Authority of spending money to expand and improve commuter rails that cater to white suburbanites while allowing bus and trolley services that serve mostly poor and minorities to shrivel and rot.

The group filed suit to stop a bus-and-trolley fare hike from \$1.10 to \$1.35 that the transit authority planned to impose even while going ahead with a multi-million dollar expansion of rail lines to Pasadena, which would be used mainly by affluent white commuters.

In a ruling that sent shivers across the nation's big cities, U.S. District Judge Terry J. Hatter Jr. issued an injunction Sept. 1 halting the rate increase pending further arguments.

"This is a traditional civil rights issue," said Constance Rice, the plaintiffs' attorney. "We're saying that there's a two-tiered system here."

She said the fare fight symbolizes the economic and racial

chasm that led to last year's LA riots.

"When you have a (rail) line that is 82 percent white and you look at the quality of service and the amount spent on it, and look at the service given to the poorest minority, we're saying: There's too big a gap."

LA transit chief Franklin White says the bus and trolley lines haven't had a fare increase in six years. The money being spent on the new train to Pasadena, he said, is aimed at easing the traffic congestion and pollution that threatens to become a 21st century nightmare.

"This is not a race lawsuit at all," said White, who says the transit system is losing \$3 million monthly because of the fare freeze.

The case is similar to a 1988 discrimination lawsuit against the metropolitan Philadelphia transit system, in which a federal judge also froze a fare hike. The transit authority eventually won, but the argument used there — that fare hikes hurt the poor while transit spending favors the rich — has emerged in various forms in Boston, Dallas and many other big cities.

Some transportation researchers blame the conflict on the inherently higher cost of running a railroad out to the suburbs and making it comfy enough to convince affluent commuters to park their cars and take the train.

"It may not be intentionally racist, but it does have the effect of being disadvantageous to lower-income people," Pucher said.

In New York, considered to have one of the most egalitarian systems, subway and bus riders pay \$1.25 a trip and their fares totaled together cover roughly half the operating costs of the system.

A suburban Long Island Rail Road commuter may pay five times more to ride each day, but commuter fares in total cover only about 36 percent of the costs — hence one argument that white riders get bigger subsidies. The suburban line also is generally cleaner, roomier, safer.

"The more affluent commuters get the heaviest subsidy, and in a fair world that wouldn't be the case," said lawyer Gene Russianoff, of the New York Public Interest Research Group.

Russianoff said his group is closely watching the LA case and could follow suit if New York's tight-fisted Republican mayor, Rudolph Giuliani, cuts spending enough to trigger fare increases.

"I think the LA lawsuit will be the first of many," agreed Scott Bernstein, head of the Center for Neighborhood Technology, which has tangled with the city of Chicago over the same issues.

The problem is, the disparate forces demanding cheaper fares, higher quality, barrier-free access for the handicapped and smaller government subsidies all have good points, said Peter Benjamin, comptroller of the Washington Area Metro Transit Authority.

"Everybody's right," he said. "That's the problem; we're in a box. They're all right."

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