

Opposition to Arizona's immigrant law continues to grow

Northwest Oregon Labor Council passes resolution condemning the new law

From the courtroom to the basketball court, opposition to Arizona's anti-immigrant law is growing rapidly across a broad cross-section of Americans.

Last month, the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) and Service Employees International Union (SEIU) were joined by several civil liberties groups in filing a class-action lawsuit in federal court challenging the constitutionality of the law.

Signed by Gov. Jan Brewer and

passed by the Republican-controlled Legislature, the law orders state and local law enforcement officials to stop anyone they suspect of being undocumented and demand they immediately produce proof they legally live in the United States. Those who cannot produce such papers are subject to arrest.

"For our members, this issue is personal," said UFCW President Joe Hansen. "UFCW members have seen first-hand how enforcement-only tactics fuel racial profiling — and lead to the trampling of our Constitution," he said.

Hansen specifically cited Immigration and Customs Enforcement raids, undertaken during the Bush Administration, against unionized Swift & Co.,

meatpacking plants. Of the more than 1,200 workers arrested in those ICE raids on Swift, 62 were undocumented. Swift was crippled so badly financially by having its plants closed for days, due to a decimated workforce, that its owners were forced to sell the historic Chicago-based firm to a Brazilian meat-packer.

"We are filing this suit to protect the rights of our members and all workers in Arizona — and to uphold the values and ideals that make our nation strong," Hansen added.

"Arizona's new immigration law is a flawed solution to a serious problem," said SEIU Executive Vice President Eliseo Medina, the son of immigrants.

"If implemented, the law will violate our most basic civil rights, burden local law enforcement and undermine public safety — all while failing to solve Arizona's immigration problems.

"We hope to stop the law before it institutionalizes racial profiling, pushes an unfunded mandate on cities and counties already strapped for cash," Medina added.

AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka said the law "severely undermines workers' rights: Any employer faced with Latino workers' complaints — in the form of a picket or a lawsuit — can simply call the police and have workers arrested under the guise of 'reasonable suspicion,'" he said.

Trumka said the law also turns public employees into federal immigration officials, requiring them to verify immigration status upon reasonable suspicion, "a complex task that they are not trained, or paid, to do," he said. "To make matters worse, public employees must now perform that task under an ever-present threat of being sued because the law subjects local governments and their employees to potential lawsuits by any citizen who believes it is not being enforced strongly enough."

Maybe one of the most personal and poignant rebukes to the Arizona law came on the basketball court at a Los Angeles Lakers-Phoenix Suns NBA playoff game May 17 in LA. Vanessa Bryant, who is half Latina and wife of Lakers superstar Kobe Bryant, was

decked out at the game in a T-shirt bearing the words: "Do I Look Illegal?"

The Suns players also are protesting the law, wearing jerseys bearing the name "Los Suns" when they play at home.

(Editor's Note: The AFL-CIO News blog and Press Associates Inc. contributed to this report.)

Union members organizing AFL-CIO constituency groups in Oregon

The AFL-CIO has member-constituency groups across the country that help minority communities get more involved in the union movement.

There are six official groups nationally — the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists (CBTU), the Labor Coalition for Latin American Advancement (LCLAA), the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW), Pride at Work (PAW), the A. Phillip Randolph Institute (APRI), and the Asian Pacific-American Labor Alliance (APALA).

These groups are open to all union members and serve as a bridge for unions to work with the diverse communities the movement represents.

The Oregon and Southwest Washington CBTU is up and running, and will soon receive its national charter. Any union members interested in getting involved should e-mail President Tina Turner-Morfitt at turnermorfitt@yahoo.com.

A group of Latino union members from building trades, service, and public sector unions are in the process of planning a meeting this month to begin a new LCLAA chapter in Oregon. Ian McEwen at the Oregon AFL-CIO is helping plan that meeting. He can be

reached by e-mail at ianpmcewen@gmail.com.

CLUW members are looking for women who want to help revive the Oregon chapter. This was a vibrant group in the past, and was able to help women get much more involved in union leadership. Anyone interested should contact Oregon AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Barbara Byrd at 503-585-6320 or e-mail her at Barbara@orafcio.org.

The Oregon AFL-CIO and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, with the help of a few other affiliated unions, are hoping to spark a new PAW chapter. While there isn't an official chapter or meetings yet, interested members can get involved by participating in the NW Pride Parade in Portland on Sunday, June 20. To get involved, contact McEwen or Jaimie Sorenson by e-mail at sorensoj@ohsu.edu.

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