



STATEMENT
November 9, 2011

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THE TIDE STARTS TO TURN

Arizona state senator Russell Pearce, author of that state's controversial policing law, SB 1070, was defeated yesterday in a special election. His ouster started with a recall petition signed by more than 18,000 voters in May. Then political neophyte Jerry Lewis bested the sitting Senate president by a vote of 53 to 45 percent. ImmigrationWorks USA president Tamar Jacoby made the following statement.

With states across the country taking immigration into their own hands, the man who started it all – former state Senator Russell Pearce of Arizona – was defeated yesterday in a groundbreaking special election.

There's nothing wrong with enforcing the law – it must be part of any solution on immigration. But in his seven years driving immigration policy in Arizona, Pearce went well beyond enforcing the law: his goal was to use draconian crackdowns – no access to government benefits, no ability to work, harassment by local law enforcement and more – to drive unauthorized immigrants out of the state.

What he didn't reckon on: the cost to the Arizona economy – even in the downturn, immigrants are essential to agriculture, hospitality and other sectors – or the damage to the state's reputation.

The vote against him wasn't a referendum on immigration – his opponent hardly mentioned it except to say he favored a more civil debate.

But there can be little question: Arizonans are tired of Pearce's strident tone. The business sector said it first: in May, 60 CEOs signed a strongly worded letter that stopped Pearce's last bundle of anti-immigrant bills dead in its tracks. Yesterday's vote drove home the point.

Will other states get the message? They just might. Voters in Georgia and Alabama, which passed tough Arizona-like bills this year, are also noticing the damage to their states' reputations – both are now being reminded daily of their Jim Crow past – not to mention the fruit and vegetables rotting in the fields as immigrant workers flee both states.

Demagoguing immigrants looks like a sure vote-getter. But as Russell Pearce just proved, it's not. Many Americans are anxious about the economy, they're troubled by change. But as Arizona made clear yesterday, they don't like the sound of hate.

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ImmigrationWorks USA is a national federation of small business owners advocating immigration reform. The organization links 25 state-based, pro-immigration business coalitions: employers and trade associations from Florida to Oregon and from every sector of the economy that relies on immigrant workers. IW works closely with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the National Restaurant Association, the National Association of Home Builders, the Associated General Contractors of America and other leading trade groups. Members of the board of directors include Marriott chairman and CEO Bill Marriott, former AZ Rep. Jim Kolbe and syndicated columnist Linda Chavez.