

AKRON BEACON JOURNAL

Sanctuaries for safety

February 9, 2017

Josh Mandel champions transparency. The Ohio treasurer has promoted the concept through his online checkbook initiative, pushing governments to make their spending accounts accessible to the public. Count as transparent, too, his political calculations, most recently his part in pushing for a ban on “sanctuary cities” across the state.

Follow the thinking: President Trump recently threatened to cut off federal funding to sanctuary cities. The president carried Ohio in the November election by 8 percentage points. Mandel is seeking a rematch with Sherrod Brown, the Democratic incumbent U.S. senator, in 2018. So, aim to ride the Trumpian wave in demonizing illegal immigrants.

Actually, this fits into a Mandel pattern of fanning fears about foreigners. He did so in his first run for treasurer, though he eventually admitted he went too far. A recent Mandel tweet returned to the edge: “Nonsense to compare Holocaust victims to today's refugees. Nazis weren't embedded with Jews fleeing Europe. Islamic terrorists embedded today.”

Recall the Cato Institute assessment: The odds of an American dying in a terrorist attack committed by a refugee are 3.6 billion to 1.

On Monday, Mandel joined with state Rep. Candice Keller, a Middletown Republican, in outlining an extreme measure that would hold city officials criminally and civilly liable for crimes committed by illegal immigrants. Mandel argues the safety of families is at stake, though he cannot point to evidence showing that illegal immigrants somehow are taking advantage of sanctuary cities and committing crimes at higher rates.

What are sanctuary cities, Cincinnati recently entering the ranks? There is no precise definition. In the main, they do not cooperate with federal immigration officials. For instance, such cities tend not to inquire about the immigration status of those they stop or question. There is nothing illegal in the practice. The responsibility for immigration enforcement belongs at the federal level.

Local communities can choose whether to cooperate.

As Vanda Felbab-Brown of the Brookings Institution recently noted, the Bush White House tried to enlist local support. The result did not reduce crime. Police departments often found the effort frustrating. Their attention shifted from higher priorities. Many didn't like the way the work alienated neighborhoods.

Which points to a crucial factor in combating crime — building trust with communities. That is what advocates of sanctuary cities seek, a much better return for public safety in sustained cooperation and communication. Such ties improve police recruiting. They also work as prevention against the “lone wolf.”

So, sanctuary cities are not “totally ignoring,” as Mandel charges, terrorist incidents in Europe. They are taking a different approach through the use of their home rule authority.

Donald Trump likely would collide with the Constitution if he tries to deprive sanctuary cities of federal funding. Josh Mandel misses in wanting local officials held criminally and civilly liable. He accuses others of “playing partisan politics.” Both he and the president are posturing, playing to fears to advance their own political agendas, neglecting the precision and the network required to deter terrorism.