

Ugly Threats

March 26, 2013

#Bigotry: Narrow-mindedness, bias, discrimination.

#Bigotry. Right here in our beloved community. How else to explain the angry calls and threats of picket lines that forced a quick shift in location for a workshop intended to help people update their immigration documents without having to drive to Phoenix.

#The Time Out Shelter sought help from the Payson Senior Center to provide a place where representatives of the Mexican Consulate could meet with people in the country legally to update their various documents and work visas. Some 35 people signed up for the sessions.

#But organizers moved the event after receiving threats. Fearing ugly incidents in front of the Senior Center, they quietly shifted to the Mountain Bible Church, which acted on its highest principles by hosting the session.

#We cannot believe that the ignorant threats would have actually resulted in an ugly scene here. But we understand the fears of the organizers.

#Immigrants have made a tremendous contribution to this nation. The Cato Institute reports that one quarter of all U.S. engineering and technology companies founded between 1995 and 2005 had at least one foreign born founder and 25 percent of all patents filed in 2005 listed an immigrant as the inventor. We have avoided the demographic trap of an aging population that has plagued Europe and Japan, thanks in large measure to immigration. Keeping our doors open to anyone willing to take risks and work hard — regardless of race or origin — honors our deepest ideals.

#We cannot say the same about the angry calls that made the organizers of the event fear for a dismaying display of ignorance and intolerance.

#Fresh start in Pine

#A fresh start's a wonderful thing. So we were buoyed by the spirit of cooperation and openness expressed by the Saturday at the Pine/Strawberry Water Improvement District forum moderated by Gila County Supervisor Tommie Martin.

#Just about everyone who spoke recognized that the district and the volunteer board has accomplished wonders in freeing the community from the paralyzing neglect of Brooke Utilities. The building moratorium that blighted the community for a decade is gone — so are the debilitating combination of rationing and water hauling.

#But the comments also demonstrated that the board has more work to do. Residents want a clear, clean water supply. The improvements don't excuse the murky water and the confusing explanations — although the district inherited a mess from Brooke Utilities. The district still must eliminate outages, get the mud and sand out of the water and better explain the need for a standby water charge to part-time residents.

#Equally important, the board must stop demonizing critics and make a greater effort to let their customers in on its decision making. That should include budget study sessions, posted agendas and publicly available staff reports that detail the costs and benefits of the choices the district must make.

#Happily, the tone of Saturday's community meeting hit just the right note. Now it's up to the board to turn a fresh start into a new approach.