

Coleman: Arizona law is creating born suspects

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I'm thankful that the U.S. Department of Justice filed suit against Arizona's immigration law because it interferes with the federal government's constitutional authority to set and enforce immigration policy. By declaring "reasonable suspicion" to be grounds for detainment, such laws not only overstep their boundary but they also ensure that people of a certain ethnicity are born a suspect.

As a result of Jim Crow and being born suspects, African Americans are all too familiar with the consequences of "reasonable suspicion."

My father and those of his generation dealt with the obstinacy of an elected class determined to keep discrimination enshrined in statute. Sadly, with the passage of this anti-Fourth Amendment legislation in Arizona, it appears a similar elected class is determined to pass that experience on to a new generation of Americans. After decades of progress, it is painful to see a state put discrimination back into place with a new twist on old laws — ushering us into the "José Crow" era.

Masquerading as a fix to our broken immigration system, Arizona's law, which goes into effect Thursday, sacrifices the liberties we have worked so hard to gain and protect. Under Arizona's stringent anti-immigrant law, a person's ethnicity and culture makes him or her "reasonably suspicious," thereby eroding the constitutional rights of certain U.S. citizens and legal residents.

Americans whose families have lived in Arizona for generations will have their citizenship questioned based on their "reasonably suspicious" physical appearance. Police will be taken away from their primary role of fighting crime as they are forced to spend more time inquiring about an individual's immigration status.

Profiling places an unnecessary wedge between law enforcement and communities. Placing "reasonable suspicion" into statute does nothing to bridge that trust gap and foster meaningful relationships between peace officers and the communities they protect.

While Americans are understandably frustrated with our nation's broken immigration system, the misguided, unconstitutional approach taken by Arizona is not the answer.

Although I'm hopeful that this lawsuit will dissuade other states from mirroring Arizona's ill-advised and unconstitutional law, the lawsuit is only the first step. President Barack Obama recently declared that the federal government "cannot kick the can down the road" and must finally solve our nation's broken immigration system.

That broken system in our country results in the conflicting message of "keep out" and "help wanted." It pits workers against each other, rewards bad-actor employers, puts honest businesses at a competitive disadvantage and leaves billions in uncollected taxes.

If done correctly, comprehensive immigration reform at the federal level can create a stronger economy for native born citizens and immigrants alike. Studies have found that a legalization program would generate \$4.5 billion to \$5.4 billion in additional net tax revenue in the first three years. The increased consumer spending from comprehensive immigration reform would be high enough to support 750,000 to 900,000 new jobs. Even the conservative Cato Institute noted that "legalization of low-skilled immigrant workers would yield significant income gains for American workers and households."

From a moral standpoint, comprehensive immigration reform would bring hard-working people out of the shadows — giving people a shot at the American dream and the opportunity to build a better life for their

children.

Instead of letting Republicans who seek short-term political gain develop divisive legislation, we must come up with a workable solution that doesn't defy the values of our society. The sad, sorry legacy of Jim Crow laws, which were meant to divide and suppress a group of people, must not be allowed to resurface. Our country must not become a society where Americans, based on a "reasonable suspicion," will have to prove they have a lawful right to be here. No American should be born a suspect.

Coleman, a Houston Democrat, chairs the County Affairs Committee in the Texas House.

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