

# A Report from Florida

*The bad news is that almost all the news is bad*

By PETER B. GEMMA

Let's start at the beginning regarding Florida and illegal immigration: there's a disconnect between Sunshine State taxpayers and their government. A July 2010 Rasmussen Poll showed that 83.5 percent of Florida voters believe illegal aliens have a negative impact on the state budget; 57 percent say illegal immigration should be reduced through better law enforcement; and 68 percent say they favor strict work site enforcement. Seventy-six percent of Hispanics in Florida believe large-scale illegal immigration is a drain on state resources. And in last year's election, 50 percent of Hispanics voted for Republican Rick Scott in Florida's gubernatorial contest even though he campaigned hard on the issue of instituting tough new Arizona-style immigration laws.

Despite those impressive figures, here's what is happening in reality...zero. That is the actual number of employers who have been charged with breaking an 11-year-old Florida law that prohibits anyone from knowingly hiring a person "who is not duly authorized to work by the immigration laws or the Attorney General of the United States." Michael Ramage, general counsel for the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, observed: "From what I can find from our statistics, the statute has never been enforced." That's a serious disconnect—law enforcement officers cannot or will not fulfill their sworn duties as written in black and white.

Florida is the seventh fastest growing state in the U.S. and has the third largest population of immigrants—it hosts, conservatively, about 810,000 illegal immigrants, making it fifth in the nation. Of those illegal aliens, about 25,000 live in Bradenton, a city of just over 50,000 residents.

Bradenton's crime statistics tell a chilling story: its murder rate is 175 percent higher than the national

average, forceable rape is over 150 percent, and aggravated assault is more than 135 percent than the rest of the country. On and on the numbers go—Bradenton's burglary stands at 200 percent more than the national average. Of the 100 most dangerous cities in the U.S. with populations of 25,000 or more, Florida has 16 entries on the list.



Anecdotal evidence that Florida is suffering from an illegal alien crime wave is evident everywhere one looks. Some of the most egregious incidents include:

- February 7: Police say that at least seven employees at the state license bureau in Delray Beach have been taking bribes to issue drivers licenses to illegal aliens. The scam allegedly put drivers licenses in the hands of more than 1,500 illegal aliens. The license examiners allegedly received from \$1,200 to \$2,500 per license. Prosecutors believe that those involved made several millions of dollars in the illegal operation by issuing bribes, making phony immigration documents, and escorting the illegal aliens to the Department of Motor Vehicles employees in question. The leader of the scam operation, state DMV employee Willy Adam, is an illegal alien himself.

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**Peter B. Gemma**, a columnist for *Middle American News* and a contributing editor to *The Social Contract*, has written for a variety of publications including *USA Today* and *Military History magazine*.

- March 7: Immigration and Customs Enforcement arrested 19 people in statewide raids. The sweep targeted illegal immigrants with criminal convictions for drug trafficking, sex crimes, and violent offenses.

- June 14: The head of the largest heroin operation in Polk County Florida history, along with others who work for him, are illegal aliens who actually collect food stamps. In addition to raking in tens of thousands of dollars in drug money, the kingpin, currently on house arrest after taking a plea deal in 2008 for yet another drug trafficking offense, got \$900 every month from the government. “You, the hard working taxpayer of this state, were paying him for this,” the Polk County Sheriff said.

- June 16: The Florida Department of Law Enforcement charged eight people from South Florida in a string of jewelry heists across several states that resulted in \$6 million worth of stolen goods.

Some critics say, however, that Florida officials are doing too *good* a job in apprehending and deporting illegal aliens. Take for example the “Secure Communities” program, a federal mandate in counties across the U.S. When a suspect is booked at a county facility, the routine fingerprint scan is sent to a federal database of known legal immigrants. If a match is not found, the suspect is forwarded to an immigration hearing and if he’s here illegally, it means deportation.

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement representatives say the program is designed to target the most dangerous and violent criminal aliens. But the Florida Center for Investigative Reporting is alarmed by analysis of data from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement: 28 percent of the 75,461 immigrants deported since Florida’s Secure Communities’ inception in 2008 have been “non-criminal” immigrants, while “just” 23 percent of those detained and deported have convictions for violent crimes such as murder or rape. However, federal officials classify “non-criminals” as those who have been *arrested* by police for an alleged crime but not *yet* convicted.

Broward County, Florida implemented Secure Communities relatively early, and the program has resulted in nearly 500 deportations of undocumented immigrants from the county—43 percent of those were criminals. The rest were either non-criminal—i.e., their “only” offense was sneaking over the border and being

on the lam—or they were “level three” offenders who had committed nonviolent crimes.

Jack Martin of the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) estimates that illegal immigration costs Florida taxpayers \$5.2 billion due to increased pressure on the criminal justice, healthcare, and education systems. In a comprehensive study, “The Costs of Illegal Immigration to Floridians,” FAIR reported that in 2008, “On the basis of an illegal and deportable alien inmate population in Florida...a net amount of out-of-pocket expenditures of about \$89 million [will] be absorbed by the Florida taxpayers.”

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In January, the newly elected Governor Rick Scott delivered on his campaign promise to bring rigorous new illegal immigration laws to Florida. State Senate President Mike Haridopolos established a committee to draft bills in the spring. The Associated Press carried a story on April 15th under the banner “Business Groups Can’t Stop Florida Immigration Bills.”

But in the end, state senators—even including the legislation’s sponsor—sheepishly confessed they probably wouldn’t pass an Arizona-style bill. That was a political reality check for Florida’s immigration reform constituency: powerful ethnic special interests and big business lobbyists stopped the bill cold by June. Theirs was a more impressive win when put in perspective: 31 dead immigration bills in the last four sessions.

Jack Oliver, legislative director of Floridians for Immigration Reform, testified during the immigration debate that: “When an illegal alien comes to this country, they’re stealing the American dream from someone who wants to come here legally.” But Mr. Oliver’s group was outgunned and outspent. Immigration reformers not only had to match the political prowess of the Chamber of Commerce and its allies, but also the resources of billionaire and radical leftist George Soros, who funds the Florida Immigrant Coalition, a small but loud special interest group that can be counted on to cry “racism” on cue.

The machinations of the anti-immigration reformers in that fight were extraordinary. The powerful Budget Committee Chairman, State Senator J.D. Alexander, is CEO of the Big Ag company Alico Inc. In 2010, Alico issued this self-serving statement:

Alico engages third parties to provide personnel for its harvesting operations. Alico communicates to such third parties its policy of employing only workers approved to work in the United States. However, Alico does not specifically monitor such compliance and the personnel engaged by such third parties could be from pools composed of immigrant labor. Changes in immigration laws or enforcement of such laws could impact the ability of Alico to harvest its crops.

Incredibly, Senator Alexander has never even blushed at his corporate “ethics” statement—nor did he recuse himself from voting.

In an interview after the defeat of the immigration

reform legislation—Republicans simply let the clock run out on several bills—Governor Scott observed: “We’ve got to get ready for the next session and let everybody we elect know that its important to us.” Scott mentioned his executive order forcing agencies to use E-Verify, Internet-based system that compares information from an employee’s job application information, to data from U.S Department of Homeland Security and Social Security Administration records to confirm employment eligibility. “I’m doing the things I can do as you know by using E-Verify for anybody that does business with the government and make sure we do it for anybody that we hire,” he said.

That’s an encouraging announcement, but it is not enough to write a “good news” report from the Sunshine State. ■