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AZ House: Prove legal status to do business

By Howard Fischer

CAPITOL MEDIA SERVICES

PHOENIX — The state House narrowly approved legislation Thursday to require all who want a state, county or city permit to do business to prove they are in this country legally.

Thursday's move came over the unanimous objection of House Democrats. Several insisted the proposal will not cut down on people crossing the border illegally while others said it places a financial burden on local governments.

But every one of the 31 Republicans on the floor voted for HB 2467, providing the minimum number of votes required for approval. The measure now goes to the Senate.

Rep. Russell Pearce, R-Mesa, said the legislation really does not change any laws.

"It's illegal to be here, it's illegal to work here," he said. "This bill simply says what we ought not to be doing is issuing them business or transaction licenses where they compete against those that are here legally."

And Rep. John Kavanagh, R-Fountain Hills, said the bill is simply an extension of what most lawmakers of both parties insist they want: sanctions on those who hire undocumented workers.

"One of the many lures to this state of illegal immigrants is the jobs that are provided here," Kavanagh said. "Turning off the lure of jobs, which removing these licenses would go a long way to doing, will do much to stop the flow of illegal immigration."

And that, he said, will end the "tsunami of illegals crossing daily."

The measure would affect any type of license, permit or authorization any level of government issues.

That could range from the license issued by the state to collect sales taxes — something required of virtually every retailer — to the permits that are required of any individual who handles food.

But Kavanagh said the legislation would not cause wide disruption.

He said all existing licenses and permits would remain in place. Only when people come in for renewal would they have to provide the proof of citizenship or that they have a legal right to be here.

Rep. Theresa Ulmer, D-Yuma, said the new requirement would put an unnecessary burden on legitimate businesses.

"I never dreamed that when I go get my business license I was going to have to dig out my birth certificate ... so I can get a business license to do business in the country I was born in," said Ulmer, a self-employed beauty consultant. "You're taking away our own rights here."

Ulmer said the only real solution is comprehensive federal immigration reform, something she said is being pushed by President Bush.

Ulmer, noting Bush will be in her hometown Monday, said she will give him a copy of this bill as an example of how the Arizona Legislature thinks it will solve the problem. "I think he'll laugh at this," she said.

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Rep. Steve Gallardo, D-Phoenix, said local agencies lack the resources to verify the accuracy of documents that will be presented, and pointed out the Republican-controlled House refused to add any funding to help the local communities.

The vote came less than a day after the House killed the measure. But that occurred because there were not enough Republicans on the floor, which allowed it to be reconsidered Thursday.

That same shortage of Republicans resulted in the defeat of two other related immigration measures, one to preclude cities and counties from recognizing the ID cards issued by foreign consulates and the other requiring those driving here with foreign licenses to prove they entered the country legally.

Pearce did not preserve the right to have those reconsidered. But he can try to resurrect them by putting their provisions onto other active bills.

Find more resources regarding immigration and border issues at azstarnet.com/border

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