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Tougher stance on illegals?

Poll of Utahns shows desire for restrictive measures

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Utahns appear to be shifting toward a tougher stance on illegal immigration, according to a new Deseret Morning News/KSL-TV television poll.

The survey shows overwhelming support for passing more "restrictive measures" in Utah. It also shows a decline in support for allowing undocumented college students to pay in-state tuition if they attend high school here for three years and graduate.

Some 91 percent of the 416 Utahns polled by Dan Jones & Associates said Utah lawmakers should enact restrictive measures such as requiring employers to verify a new hire's legal status or requiring applicants for public benefits to show proof of legal status. Some 79 percent said such laws "definitely should" be passed; only 7 percent opposed it. The poll's margin of error is 5 percent.

DESERET MORNING NEWS/KSL-TV **POLL**

Currently Utah law allows undocumented students who attend a Utah high school for three years and graduate to pay in-state tuition at Utah colleges and universities. Do you think the Legislature should keep the law as it is or repeal the law?

DEFINITELY KEEP AS IS	29%
PROBABLY KEEP AS IS	22%
PROBABLY REPEAL	10%
DEFINITELY REPEAL	30%
DON'T KNOW	9%

In your opinion, should Utah lawmakers enact more restrictive measures on illegal immigration, such as requiring employers to verify a new hire's legal status or requiring applicants for public benefits to show proof of legal status?

DEFINITELY SHOULD	79%
PROBABLY SHOULD	12%
PROBABLY SHOULD NOT	4%
DEFINITELY SHOULD NOT	3%
DON'T KNOW	2%

A poll of 416 Utah residents was conducted Nov. 14-16, 2006, by Dan Jones & Associates. It has a margin of error of +/-5.0 percent.

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The restrictive measures received strong support among conservatives but were also supported by a majority of moderates and liberals in the statewide poll conducted Nov. 14 to 16.

Meanwhile, a slim majority of 51 percent said they supported keeping in place the in-state tuition law. Just over a year ago, another Deseret Morning News poll showed 60 percent of Utahns supported it.

Kirk Jowers, executive director of the University of Utah's Hinckley Institute for Politics, said the differing poll results indicate a sense of fairness, but also of frustration.

"On the one hand, why should we not take some common-sense measures for the undocumented children in this country; they are here," he said. "There is also the feeling that illegal immigration is still illegal."

The poll results could bode well for lawmakers eyeing bills that would crack down on illegal

immigration.

Archie Archuleta, co-chair of the bipartisan Utah Hispanic Legislative Task Force, saw the apparent shift in public opinion as a troubling by-product of the inaction in Washington.

In the same Deseret Morning News poll in July 2005 that found 60 percent support for undocumented students getting in-state tuition rates, respondents were less certain on other aspects of immigration. For example, a majority of Utahns supported amnesty, but a majority also supported provisions such as allowing local law officers to support immigration laws and requiring employers verify workers' legal status.

"Some cities and counties are going a little crazy over illegal immigration because the feds have failed to act," Archuleta said. "Unfortunately most of these solutions are punitive. They are not designed to solve problems; they are designed to punish."

However, Rep. Karen Morgan, D-Cottonwood Heights, said the poll results exemplify what she heard on the campaign trail.

"I am contacted quite frequently by constituents, I know it's important to them," she said.

That's why Morgan says she plans to introduce legislation in the 2007 Legislative session that would resemble a slate of new Colorado laws aimed at cracking down on illegal immigration.

"We are looking at unemployment benefits and welfare benefits and some of the fraud dealing with Social Security cards," Morgan said. "I'm looking at (Colorado's) full package."

The Colorado package includes measures ranging from denying most non-emergency medical benefits to adult undocumented immigrants to barring the undocumented from accessing public benefits to cracking down on those who employ undocumented immigrants.

Rep. Glenn Donnelson, R-North Ogden, said he hasn't decided whether to reintroduce legislation that would require employers to verify their workers' identity.

"The only people that have a problem with that is your construction companies," Donnelson said. "I would hope we could bring something forward."

Donnelson said he is also looking at again trying to repeal the law that grants in-state tuition to undocumented immigrants who went to a Utah high school for three years and graduated.

The tuition issue could become a divisive one at the state Legislature. In the last session, the bill was kept from a House vote, in large part by Rep. David Ure, R-Kamas, who sponsored the 2002 law.

Ure won't be returning to the Legislature after losing a Senate bid. But the law still has supporters. Gov. Jon Huntsman Jr. supports keeping the current law in place, said Mike Mower, the governor's deputy chief of staff. The governor hasn't spoken with any lawmakers about other immigration issues, Mower said.

One of the law's original supporters, Sen. Howard Stephenson, R-Draper, said, "I'm prepared to defend it."

"They ought to have the same opportunity to attend college as their high school peers," he said. "Otherwise, we are sending a message to them ... you have no future."

Stephenson said he wasn't surprised by the poll results, given the limited information most people can access on the issue.

"There is a visceral reaction to illegal immigration. I have that myself," he said. "But when the federal government refuses to provide a means by which legal immigrant workers can be here, it creates a whole set of other problems that need to be addressed, and this is one of them."

Alex Segura, director of the anti-illegal immigration Utah Minuteman Project, doubted lawmakers would pay heed to the poll numbers. He pointed to past experience, such as Donnelson's bill to require employers verify workers' legal status, which died in committee.

"Lawmakers have been willing to overlook what the people have wanted in favor of the status quo," Segura said. "It will be a lot of chewing the fat without any real results."

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