



Gonzales asks Valley business leaders to help defeat anti-immigrant legislation

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AUSTIN - The chair of the Mexican American Legislative Caucus's new immigration task force has asked Rio Grande Valley business leaders to help her defeat bad immigration legislation.

Rep. Veronica Gonzales, D-McAllen, made her comments at a luncheon hosted by McAllen city and chamber leaders. Tuesday was McAllen Day at the state Capitol.

Introducing Gonzales, Adrian Arriaga, chairman of the McAllen Chamber of Commerce's governmental affairs committee, said the McAllen lawmaker's chairmanship of the MALC task force was a "big deal" for the business community.

"We know there is a lot of legislation coming forth that could be very divisive and that could be very destructive economically to us in our area," Gonzales said. "We want the public, the whole state of Texas to know how important the Rio Grande Valley is to the state of Texas. How much we produce in income, how much we contribute."

Living on the border, Gonzales said she and everyone at the luncheon knew how important it was to develop and maintain a good working relationship with Mexico. She said focusing on border security and illegal immigration alone was not the answer.

"It's about humanity, it's about economics, it is about living the American Dream," Gonzales said. "There is a way we can reach comprehensive reform that will allow people to legitimize and legalize themselves and work here and contribute back, without making them all criminals."

Comprehensive reform would benefit everyone, Gonzales said. "I am looking for all of your help on this immigration task force; my colleagues in the House and in the Senate and also the chamber members," she added.

Asked after the luncheon if he concurred, Sen. Juan "Chuy" Hinojosa, D-McAllen, said: "Absolutely." Hinojosa pointed to the success of a recent Valley legislator's tour organized by the Rio Grande Valley Partnership.

"It changed the minds of some of the legislators, especially Senator Dan Patrick," Hinojosa said, referring to the freshman Republican lawmaker and outspoken talk radio host from Houston.

"They saw how vibrant our economy is and the relationship we have with Mexico and the tremendous growth taking place in the Valley. That made quite an impact on them and they now understand we are for border security but also for protection of the economy."

Rep. Aaron Peña, D-Edinburg, a member of the House leadership team, said Valley residents might be surprised how close top Republicans were to the Valley delegation on immigration issues.

"We are simply highlighting what they already believe," Peña said, after the luncheon. "That may sound funny but the point is the Republican leadership is very pro-business. All we have to do is highlight what they already believe, which is that business is good for Texas."

Peña said the key role Valley lawmakers could play on immigration legislation this session was pointing out "how



Rep. Veronica Gonzales

important an economic driver the border is" for the state Texas.

"They already believe it. They have come around. They are not 100 percent but we are a far cry from where we started at the start of the session," Peña said, of the leadership.

In his luncheon speech, McAllen Mayor Richard Cortez asked a series of questions as he focused on the need for the American economy to grow its workforce. He pointed out that the baby boom generation was retiring and the fertility rate of the nation was zero. The obvious answer, Cortez said, was legal immigration.

"It's a shame the government is only paying attention to security and illegal immigration. Who is minding the cash register? Who is minding the store? Who is paying attention to what is happening to our economy?" Cortez asked.

"Why don't we start talking about the benefits of legal immigration first? Let's start changing it around. Are there benefits to legal immigration and if so, what are they? Solve the legal immigration issue and a lot of the issues of illegal immigration go away."

Cortez said those who live and work on the border do not see their location as a handicap but rather an advantage.

"But, that advantage will disappear very quickly through U.S. public policy or Texas state public policy that hinders the legitimate flow of legitimate trade in our border areas," he said.

Cortez pointed out that Mexico was Texas's largest trading partner and that 80 percent of border commerce came through its ports of entry.

"What are we asking you to do, Texas? Help us with the growth infrastructure to be able to welcome trade with Mexico coming this way. Let us pass it on to other corridors," Cortez said.

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