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Rocky Mountain Poll

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IMMIGRATION DEBATE COVERAGE LEADS ARIZONANS TO EXAGGERATE
THE PROPORTION OF ILLEGAL ALIENS IN THE WORKFORCE; IGNITES
HOSTILE FEELINGS TOWARD BUSINESSES WHO HIRE THEM

Phoenix, Arizona, October 5, 2005. The political debate on immigration policy and the presence of illegal immigrants in Arizona has left the public grossly misinformed and potentially ready to endorse public policy hostile to employers who hire illegal immigrants. The public opines that four of ten employees in the private sector are illegal immigrants and nearly four in ten favor forcing out of business companies who hire illegal aliens.

Eight of ten have an opinion about the proportion of employees in the state who are illegal immigrants, a high figure on any public issue and a clear sign that the debate has left few un-opinionated on the subject. And when we look at the estimates of illegals Arizonans believe work in various industries, some of the numbers are simply astounding. Six of ten lawn and maintenance company employees are thought to be illegals; 45 percent of construction workers, 40 percent of all restaurant workers and workers in the hospitality industry, a third of all home repair and maintenance workers, 29 percent of manufacturing employees and a full fifth of retail store workers are believed to be illegal aliens.

If the estimates are projected to the entire work force, four of ten are thought to be illegals aliens. And yet, according to the Arizona Department of Economic Security, there are 2,456,300 individuals in the Arizona non-farm payroll work force of which 2,064,600 are in the private sector. The public believes that 38 percent of all non-government workers are illegal aliens. This would project to 784,548 illegal aliens in the work force—a figure that is equal to 70 percent of the entire Latino population in Arizona between the ages of 17 and 74. In fact, 72 per cent of Arizona Latinos are U.S. citizens and of the balance, many are non-citizens legally in the U.S.

This same study also revealed that Arizonans grossly underestimate the proportion of Arizona Latinos who are U.S. citizens or who are English speakers (see RMP-2005-III-10, September 20, 2005, at BRCPOLLS.COM). The simple fact is that the public debate and coverage of that debate up to this point in time appears to have done more to obscure the realities of the Latino population in Arizona than to clarify it and in the process runs the very real risk of branding all Latinos as illegal aliens. As well, it may be doing serious damage to the deep positive regard for small businesses in Arizona, which comprise more than 90 percent of all business structures in the state.

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The findings outlined in this report are based on a survey of 600 adult heads of household throughout Maricopa County conducted between August 22 and September 2, 2005, by the Behavior Research Center of Arizona as part of the Center's independent and non-partisan Rocky Mountain Poll series. The public is welcome to visit www.brcpolls.com to read this and other recent polls.

This survey also finds that 38 percent of Arizonans surveyed favor lifting the business licenses of any employer who hires illegal aliens, while only a bare majority (51%) stand in opposition to such a law. What is perhaps most astonishing about the survey is the additional finding that these opinions hold even though people estimate that as many as one-third of all businesses in the state would be forced to close under such a law.

Finally, a majority opine that if the government did pass a law forcing out of business companies who hire illegal aliens, Arizona taxpayers and the state government should provide unemployment benefits to the US citizen employees of those companies would lose their jobs.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: This Rocky Mountain Poll Arizona (2005-III-11) is based on 600 telephone interviews conducted from August 22 through September 2, 2005, with adult heads of household throughout Maricopa County. In a sample of this size, one may say with 95 percent certainty that the results have a statistical precision of plus or minus 3.8 percent of what they would have been had the entire adult population been surveyed. The Rocky Mountain Poll is conducted by the Behavior Research Center of Arizona and is an independent and non-partisan research program.

This statement conforms to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.

BELOW: Statistical data

For this and other polls, see www.brcpolls.com/results

