

Some say immigration law could harm state's economy

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Special to the Sun

If Gov. Robert Bentley signs an immigration law resulting from the bills passed in both houses of the Alabama Legislature this month, it will have a negative effect on the state's economy, according to Martha Rovira, coordinator of Hispanic/Latino Ministries of the Alabama-West Florida Conference of the United Methodist Church.

Rovira cited estimates from the Institute for Taxation and Economic Policy that estimate state and local taxes paid by households headed by illegal immigrants. For 2010, the taxes paid by those households to Alabama were calculated

at \$25.8 million in personal income taxes, \$5.8 million in property taxes and \$98.7 million in sales taxes.

Rep. Barry Moore, R-Enterprise, who co-sponsored the proposed immigration law, said Alabama cannot afford to provide services to people who are in the state illegally.

"The cost to the state of providing medical care to illegal aliens giving birth in Alabama is \$14 million per year," said Moore, who voted for the immigration bill, HB56, when the state House of Representatives passed it April 5. He said the children are automatically U.S. citizens and eligible for Medicaid cards, which adds to the financial burden on the state.

Moore said the cost of

educating the children of illegal immigrants puts a strain on the state education budget.

Poultry producer Wayne Farms LLC, which has facilities in six states, including six in Alabama and one on Georgia, issued a press release April 18 in response to an immigration bill in Georgia, stating that the law "would adversely affect the poultry industry and business community."

Proposed immigration laws in both Alabama and Georgia are widely described as Arizona-style.

The press release said, "Wayne Farms is of the belief this bill will negatively impact all immigrants as it could prompt documented workers to exit Georgia

businesses and communities along with undocumented workers to avoid being subject to an anti-immigrant climate."

According to the company's website, the Wayne Farms facility in Coffee County employs 1,600 people.

The bill passed by the Alabama Senate on April 21, SB256, incorporates ideas from laws in Arizona, Missouri and Oklahoma, according to the bill's sponsor, Sen. Scott Beason, R-Gardendale.

Anyone stopped by a law enforcement officer in Alabama could be required to provide proof that he or she is a citizen of the United States or an authorized alien if the proposed

immigration law is implemented.

Many of the provisions are related to employment and public benefits, but one section of the Senate bill prohibits illegal immigrant children from participating in any school activities "outside of the basic course of study in any primary, secondary, or postsecondary educational program."

Moore said immigration is more of a federal

issue, but because Congress is not dealing with it state lawmakers will "do what we can do." He expects the differences in the bills passed by the two houses of the Legislature to be resolved quickly.

"This is a Band-Aid on a big problem," Moore said.

Troy University journalism student Laurel Akin wrote this story as part of a project funded by the Alabama Press Association Journalism Foundation.

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