

Okla. Eyes 'Arizona-Plus' Immigration Law

Karen Schwartz

(May 20) -- The spotlight on hard-line immigration laws could swing east from Arizona next week, when lawmakers in Oklahoma deal with proposals that include making it a felony for illegal immigrants to own a toy gun.

Another provision expected to come to a vote before the Oklahoma Legislature session ends May 28 would allow state authorities to seize businesses or property from people who knowingly employ, transport or harbor illegal immigrants, said Rep. Randy Terrill, chairman of the Public Safety and Judiciary Committee in the Oklahoma House.

"If you get caught with a van-load of illegal aliens and you are transporting them to a job site, the van would be subject to seizure," Terrill said in a phone interview with AOL News this week.



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Oklahoma state Rep. Randy Terrill, here in 2006, said he hopes his state's immigration laws will someday mirror those of Arizona.

A third measure would expand Oklahoma's racketeering laws to include activities associated with illegal immigration, he said.

"You're giving state and local law enforcement a financial incentive for enforcing laws we already have in place. I think in that point we have something that is Oklahoma-specific and something that is on par with -- if not going a little bit further than -- Arizona," Terrill said.

Arizona's new law requires police to check the immigration status of people during a stop if they suspect them of being in the country illegally. It also allows people to sue local

agencies if they feel immigration laws are not being enforced. If the immigration law survives legal challenges, it is scheduled to take effect July 29.

Terrill called the Oklahoma measures "Arizona-plus," but added that he would like to see the Arizona measures in his state in the future.

"I'm very interesting in mirroring what has been done in Arizona," he said. "I just don't think we have time."

Arizona last month adopted the nation's toughest measures against undocumented immigrants. Lawmakers in Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Minnesota, Missouri and Michigan quickly introduced copycat legislation.

Lawmakers in several other states that have already adjourned or are wrapping up legislative sessions -- Alabama, Texas, Utah, Idaho and Maryland -- have promised to push for measures similar to Arizona's when their legislators reconvene.

In Colorado, Republican Scott McInnis, who is leading Democratic Gov. John Hickenlooper in the polls, has promised something similar to Arizona's law if he is elected.

In Oklahoma, the legislation targeting illegal immigrants will come as a surprise to some, including some of Terrill's fellow Republicans. Rep. Lee Denney, the assistant majority floor leader, said this week the House was not expecting any immigration law this year, "unless he's going to spring it on us."

Only one of the three measures has already been introduced -- the gun bill. The others will be tacked on to legislation coming out of committee, Terrill said. He declined to say which bills they would be attached to. But even the gun bill, introduced months ago, has not garnered much publicity. It would make it a felony for an undocumented person to carry a firearm, have one in the house or ride in a car with one. And a firearm could be anything from a machine gun to a toy pistol.

"On the surface, it seems like a very innocuous type of legislation. You would think there have been instances of gang members having toy guns pretending they are real, and supposedly this is what this legislation is meant to address," said Marisa Trevino, a former Oklahoma resident who now runs the online news site Latina Lista from Dallas.

But, she cautioned, since there is no age-specific requirement in the bill, there is nothing to prevent the arrest of an undocumented child playing cops and robbers.

"If the wrong type of law enforcement officer was there at that time, he would do it without question," Trevino said.

Rep. Mike Christian, sponsor of the gun bill, did not return calls seeking comment.

Terrill defended his decision to introduce the other measures at the last minute. "These three provisions have been thoroughly discussed and well vetted throughout the session," he said.

George Adams, an Oklahoma City-based filmmaker who is about to release "Panic Nation," a documentary about the growth of the anti-immigration movement, was unaware of the gun bill and Terrill's plans for next week. But he was not surprised.

"It becomes a contest as to who can have the most outrageous anti-immigration law," Adams said.

Terrill said he has no doubt that the measures will pass by an "overwhelming margin." But others wonder if concern about lawmakers' reaction is one reason he is waiting until the eleventh hour to introduce them. Oklahoma lawmakers have at times embraced strict measures against undocumented residents, but at other times have shied away.

A previous attempt by Terrill to expand drug seizure laws to illegal immigrants failed in 2008. In 2007, however, the Oklahoma Legislature overwhelmingly passed House Bill 1804, what was then the toughest anti-immigration legislation in the country. It denied driver's licenses and public services to illegal immigrants and criminalized knowingly transporting, concealing and harboring illegal immigrants. Some other portions of the measure have been struck down by the 10th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

Oklahoma has also passed measures that eliminated Spanish-language drivers' license testing, require the collection of DNA from illegal aliens who are arrested and are to be deported, and charge a fee for the wire transfer of money out of the country. A measure to make English the official language of state business will be on the ballot this November.

Adams said he couldn't predict whether Terrill's new measures will have support in the Oklahoma Legislature.

"We were all very quiet when HB1804 was being introduced, because people honestly believed it was so ludicrous it wouldn't pass," he said. "This time I'm hoping that enough people can say, 'We don't want the same reputation that Arizona has right now. We don't need that headache.'"

<http://www.aolnews.com/nation/article/oklahoma-shoots-for-arizona-plus-immigration-law/19483044>