

**Yuma Sun**

## **Employer sanctions ruling no surprise to either side**

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Yuma County residents on both sides of the issue of Arizona's employer sanctions law weren't surprised by a judge's decision to uphold the law, but some predicted the law will be overturned while others don't see the law changing.

A federal judge dismissed a lawsuit filed by business groups against the Arizona law that prohibits businesses from knowingly hiring illegal immigrants.

"I don't think anybody's surprised that he upheld the law and I never believed from the beginning that he was going to," said Ken Rosevear, executive director for Yuma County Chamber of Commerce.

The ruling will be appealed in the U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals, where Rosevear doesn't "foresee them making any change in the law."

The law requires businesses to use a federal database to verify applicants' employment eligibility. Those that don't could have their licenses suspended or revoked if they knowingly hire an illegal immigrant.

There have been no complaints against any employers in Yuma County since the law went into effect on Jan. 1, Rosevear said.

Rosevear said that although he does not anticipate issues concerning Yuma County employers violating the law, the chamber of commerce "vehemently" opposes provisions that revoke business licenses after repeated violations of the law.

"We see no advantage or need to put someone out of business," Rosevear said.

That would lead to unemployment and will still not fix the immigration problem, he said.

"I don't think that will ever come to that in Yuma County. The employers in Yuma County are working very strongly to conform to the law and I think it will continue that way," Rosevear said.

John Boeltz, president of Yuma County Farm Bureau, said the regulation not only affects the agricultural businesses, but all businesses that need to hire any employee since the measure went into effect.

Boeltz disagrees with the federal judge's ruling and believes it will be overturned in the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals.

"Don't get me wrong, I'm 100 percent for legal workers all the time every day - that's what we need. Unfortunately we don't have that and that's a problem.

"I think what we'd like to see is a legal program to get workers into this country. We desperately need workers in this country and there's just a lot of work to be done and not a lot of people out there to do it," Boeltz said.

"(I) respect the judge's legal ruling but he's 100 percent wrong on this case."

Having to verify the legality of each person using the database is a process Boeltz said needs more work.

Employers "now are forced to comply with a program that even the (federal government) believes is not ready for prime time," he said.

Joe Melchionne, chairman of the Yuma Republican Party, said that before any regulations went in to effect, at least two immigration issues should have been addressed: Figure a way to have the borders "closed off" to prevent illegal immigrants from entering the country, and document the status of each person so that employers can easily verify it when hiring people.

In addition, Melchionne suggested "a program that allows workers to come cross (legally). Our agricultural industry in Yuma depends on that, depends on these workers, so we need them."

Petra Falcon, lead organizer for Yuma County Interfaith, said the upholding of the sanction law will hurt the economy and separate families.

Interfaith is a network of religious, lay members and individuals working together with the aim to strengthen family and community solidarity.

With very little education given regarding the law, people are confused and employers will not have the work force they need to operate, she said.

"Everybody is getting hurt with this law. I think the employer sanction law was really a reaction to the lack of immigration reform that did not take place this year."

Falcon said it should be Congress making decisions about immigration and not the state.

The Yuma County Attorney's Office, which is charged with enforcing the law, could not be reached for comment Friday.