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In Case You Missed It

King Shouldn't Defend NM Driver's License Policy

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By Matt Chandler

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King shouldn't defend NM driver's license policy

In 2003, Governor Bill Richardson signed legislation to allow those who are in this country unlawfully to obtain a New Mexico driver's license.

Seven years later, however, it is clear this experiment has failed, and yet the state's chief law enforcement officer, Attorney General Gary King, is still defending the policy – even as recently as this week.

New Mexico is now one of only three states in the country that doesn't require proof of citizenship or legal residency to obtain a state-issued license, and we've learned the hard way that being part of this exclusive club has left us vulnerable to fraud, crime and abuse. How? Because in the 47 other states that issue driver's licenses, along with other privileges, this form of identification signifies that the bearer is someone who is in our country legally. So, you can see why a New Mexico driver's license becomes so attractive to illegal immigrants.

With that in mind, it is understandable that a recent analysis found that following the passage of Arizona's immigration law, there was a 60 percent increase in the number of licenses issued to immigrants in the three states which have the most relaxed licensing laws – including New Mexico.

Just recently, an Illinois man was caught running advertisements in a Polish-language newspaper guaranteeing New Mexico licenses in exchange for \$1,000. The man admitted to making at least five trips to the state to help his illegal clients get a license from the Land of Enchantment.

Last year, it was determined that two of the three suspects who were involved in a robbery and shooting at a local Albuquerque restaurant were in the United States illegally – both had New Mexico drivers' licenses.

And when federal agents were investigating a case involving Brazilians being transported in to the state from New Jersey for licenses, the feds noted that “New Mexico is one of a handful of states in which driver's licenses are easily obtainable by illegal aliens using false documents.”

Defending a law that puts New Mexicans at risk

Although the obvious flaws in New Mexico's driver's license policy are glaring, it's still on the books, which is a shame, because Gary King knows full well that implementation of this policy has led to increased criminal activity. And yet, except for defending the policy, the attorney general has remained silent. On a radio show in June, Gary King trotted out the tired argument that without the policy, “we are just forcing people to drive without us ever seeing if they can drive or not and that might cause fatal accidents on the road.”

Last Wednesday during a debate, while I unequivocally stated my opposition to the law, Mr. King was quick to say he disagreed with me and went on to defend the virtues of the law.

Scaring people into believing that without this law more motorists on our roads would be in danger misses the point entirely and is ludicrous and irresponsible. Instead, as the state's chief law officer, King should have used his influence to draw attention to the dangers New Mexicans face because of the law, especially since the policy has generated criminal activity. He had four years to petition the governor and the Legislature to fix the law, but he did not.

Unfortunately, it would appear that Gary King would rather defend a law that puts New Mexicans at risk than disagree with members of his party who are responsible for crafting it. Putting politics above the safety of New Mexicans is inexcusable.

Four years ago, Gary King promised “to be the kind of state attorney general who will continually root out corruption before it saps state government operations or integrity – and before it's blatant enough to catch the federal prosecutors' attention.” Today, we are still waiting for this to happen.

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