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OUR VIEW

Early organizing can protect New Mexico's immigrants

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The new reality may be that Donald Trump will begin serving a second term on Jan. 20, 2025, but in New Mexico the larger reality on the ground is that citizens, activists and organizers are sending a message that this state will not be a part of the administration's promised crackdown on immigration.

It's a humane position, one that leaders of churches, synagogues and mosques will be supporting, as will the many men and women of goodwill and heart in our state.

New Mexicans want to be safe and secure, yes, but unlike the fearmonger in chief, they understand the contributions immigrants make.

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but they do not want to see families divided, children snatched from their schools or working people reduced to living shadow-like existences. New Mexicans are not cruel.

What Trump has promised is inhumane — the largest deportation in U.S. history, with the military authorized to round up people and place them in deportation camps. Leave the moral argument behind. This vision is bad for business; as in, it will damage our economy, both at a state and national level.

With roughly 11 million people living in the United States without legal documentation, rounding everyone up would remove essential workers and cost billions of dollars. And, as Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham never fails to point out, most recently last week in a lengthy interview on MSNBC's *Morning Joe*, the deportation plan being discussed is unconstitutional.

First, the dollars. In New Mexico, immigrants make up 11% of the workforce and play a dominant role in key sectors such as construction, agriculture, hospitality, as well as the oil and gas industry. They pay billions in taxes, sustaining essential government services and such programs as Social Security, unemployment insurance, and free or reduced-price school lunches.

On Friday, immigrant advocates gathered at the Roundhouse in Santa Fe to describe how the state can protect immigrants, given the federal climate. Rather than waiting for immigration officers to show up knocking on doors, New Mexico advocates want to use the Legislature to pass laws designed to protect people who don't have papers.

Joined by House Speaker Javier Martínez, various groups presented a sweeping list of proposals.

They included limiting the sharing of personal and sensitive information by state employees; ensuring data brokers can't give driver's license data to Immigration and Customs Enforcement; restricting use of state resources to enforce civil and federal immigration laws; and providing additional funding for nonprofit organizations that provide legal representation in deportation, adjustment of legal status and citizenship cases, especially in rural areas.

Other proposals would provide access to in-state tuition and financial aid for adult immigrant workers and certain juveniles enrolled in credit and noncredit workforce development programs, and funds to provide more English-language and GED courses, and citizenship preparation tutoring. As the legislation is rolled out, we will be able to evaluate each proposal, but early organizing demonstrates an understanding of the stakes to come. This is necessary work.

Bolstering their case for the economic harm from deportation, advocates released figures that show New Mexico's immigrant population contributes approximately $1.4 billion in federal, state, and local taxes, with $554.6 million of that amount supporting public schools, hospitals, roads, and

more. Nationally, figures from the American Immigration Council show that in 2022 alone, undocumented immigrant households paid $46.8 billion in federal taxes and $29.3 billion in state and local taxes. Undocumented immigrants also contributed $22.6 billion to Social Security and $5.7 billion to Medicare.

And, as Lujan Grisham argued forcefully, New Mexico won't cooperate, not because of differences in politics, but because "it's unlawful. You can't use the military, you can't do mass deportations. So any federal administration, you should expect states, and I think you should expect some bipartisan support not just by the Democratic governors, is that violating the constitution and the law, we're not going to do that."