

Business As Usual – Phoenix Mayor Trying to Have It Both Ways

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Phoenix police may now contact Immigrations and Customs Enforcement when they suspect a person to be in the country illegally, a shift in policy that is expected to increase the number of illegal immigrants deported from the state.

Chief Jack Harris announced new changes on Thursday to Operations Order 1.4, the police policy on immigration that previously prevented officers in most cases from asking about a person's citizenship status.

The policy has been a lightning rod for criticism from residents who want to see Phoenix do more to combat illegal immigration and helped foment the current recall effort against Mayor Phil Gordon.

The president of the Phoenix Law Enforcement Association expressed his membership's pleasure at the change: "We see it as a major improvement," he said. "If we wanted 100 percent change, we probably got about 75 or 80 percent."

Not surprisingly, pro-immigration forces were upset. One immigration advocate said it would have "a chilling effect on the community." Another called it "a vicious, inhumane attitude to brothers and sisters of the same human race."

Gordon chose not to paint the Phoenix PD with the same accusatory words that he used against the sheriff. In fact, he was downright supportive.

"It doesn't come without a price," Gordon said. "The more we're involved in this fight, the less we're able to fight against and prevent other crimes.

"But the chief said this is necessary to give his officers more tools, and I concur with that."

Not for the first time, the mayor seems to want to have it both ways, to lead the public charge against Sheriff Joe and immigration opponents, to reach out and enlarge his support statewide, while protecting his base by quietly pacifying his police department and its supporters.

For his part, the sheriff was not completely overwhelmed by the move.

Arpaio praised the department for giving officers more discretion but questioned the need to have them consult with a supervisor before contacting ICE.

"I give my deputies a lot of latitude to make their own decisions, and they don't have to call anybody," Arpaio said. "I've always said they've got a gun and badge and they're going to make their own decisions about who they arrest without having to call any supervisors."