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Ray proposes controversial immigration resolution

by Becky Ginos

09.02.10 - 06:35 pm

SALT LAKE CITY — Rep. Paul Ray, R-Clearfield has stepped into a firestorm. Ray has proposed a resolution that would deny U.S. citizenship to children born to illegals. During a press conference, held Monday on Capitol Hill, Ray presented statistics showing some \$63.5 million of taxpayer money is going to provide benefits to children of undocumented immigrants.

“We’ve got a problem,” said Ray. “The immigration problem is not going away anytime soon. I believe we need to start the discussion. With this (resolution) I think we’ve done that.”

The resolution calls for a change in the 14th Amendment of the Constitution that currently allows for any child born on American soil to automatically become a U.S. citizen.

“We can’t afford to take care of the people in our state who need help; then we’re using it (funding) for illegals,” Ray said. He said he doesn’t mean to be hardhearted or uncaring, he just believes a line must be drawn to stop funding illegals.

Others say Ray’s resolution wouldn’t do much to solve the current budget shortfalls. Policy director for the Utah Health Policy Project, Lincoln Nehring, said cutting Medicaid funding for undocumented mothers would only save about \$15 million, which he believes wouldn’t make much of a dent. Nehring also said Ray’s numbers may not account for people who are here legally but didn’t prove citizenship for some reason.

Under Ray’s resolution, the children could be deported with their parents. However, some quarters expressed concern over where they would be deported to and if the countries would accept the children.

Gov. Gary Herbert has expressed interest in making the change to the 14th Amendment if it would help stop incentives for people to come here illegally.

Ray knows it will be a long road and hard battle to fight. “I’ve already received some nasty emails,” he said. “But I never judge a piece of legislation on whether there will be repercussions. I’ll do what is right.”

The resolution is being drafted by legislative attorneys according to Ray. He hopes to have an initial draft out in late November or early December before the 2011 legislative session.

If the resolution passes, Ray said it would have to go through Congress because constitutional changes cannot be made at the state level. “I hope they’ll (Congress) take action,” he said. “I’ll be crossing my fingers. The resolution says to Congress, ‘this is what the state of Utah wants.’”

Ray said he thinks Reps. Rob Bishop and Jason Chaffetz will probably be supportive in some way and if Mike Lee is elected to the Senate he would be “perfect” to look at it because of his constitutional background.

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