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Opinion

## **Editorial: Florida lawmakers must soundly denounce white nationalism, shut down 'sanctuary cities' bill**

**By The Palm Beach Post Editorial Board**

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We should be shocked that an extremist anti-immigrant group with racist origins has helped craft the Florida Senate bill to ban so-called sanctuary cities. But we're getting used to extremes.

Even so, we are repulsed that a Florida representative of the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) told the News Service of Florida that his group suggested the idea of giving the Florida attorney general authority to take action against local governments.

The bill's sponsor, Sen. Joe Gruters, R-Sarasota, who is also chairman of the Republican Party of Florida, insists that FAIR had no input into the language of the proposed legislation. Yet the bill, SB 186, would give Attorney General Ashley Moody the authority to issue injunctions against state or local authorities that don't -- in her opinion -- cooperate with federal immigration authorities. Moody supports the bill.

Moreover, the Senate's staff analysis of the bill cites a FAIR-supplied list of 15 municipalities labeled as "sanctuary cities." Or as FAIR's David Caulkett calls them, "anarchy cities."

In addition, another FAIR official gave Gruters' staff tips on how to defend the sanctuary city bill against critics, according to emails obtained by the GateHouse Tallahassee bureau.

How extreme is FAIR? Well, it was started by a Michigan ophthalmologist named John Tanton who was mightily alarmed that America's white majority was in danger of being swallowed up by people of other skin colors. He founded several other groups, as well, including the Center for Immigration Studies (CIS).

“For European-American society and culture to persist requires a European-American majority, and a clear one at that,” Tanton wrote in 1993. “As Whites see their power and control over their lives declining, will they simply go quietly into the night? Or will there be an explosion?” he wrote in 1986.

For years, Tanton organizations lurked on the nativist fringe of politics. But in the Trumpian Republican Party, their influence has gone mainstream, reaching into the White House itself.

The Southern Poverty Law Center has branded FAIR and CIS as “hate groups” -- a label the groups heatedly deny. But if your founding premise is to ensure that white people remain the majority in the U.S., it stands to reason that to some degree you are viewing immigration, illegal and otherwise, through a racial lens. It’s not that far from Tanton to President Trump’s exasperation that the U.S. admits too many people from “s\*\*\*hole countries.”

This view should not be validated by state law.

The evident influence of FAIR makes even more specious the current craze to wipe out sanctuary cities. Or as they might more accurately be called: “mythical cities.”

In all of Florida, only one municipality has been threatened with the loss of federal grants by the Trump administration for allegedly protecting undocumented immigrants. That’s West Palm Beach, which declared itself a “Welcoming City” several years ago. The resolution didn’t stop city officials from working with the feds on immigration enforcement, but it prevented city employees from investigating someone’s citizenship or immigration status. Reason: to ease crime victims’ fear of going to the city police.

But according to the Senate bill’s staff analysis itself, the city is in the clear: “West Palm Beach now appears on the current FDLE list of jurisdictions that have submitted certifications stating that it is in compliance with federal immigration laws.”

Republican lawmakers, in other words, are making a huge show of cracking down on a big nothing -- nothing, that is, but a symbol rich in appeal to white American resentments and insecurities.

And at the same time, the state's GOP leaders are refusing to require employers to check workers' citizenship status through the database E-Verify. The truth is, Florida's biggest industries don't want to lose their low-cost workers -- not in farm fields, hotels or construction sites. That goes even for the biggest immigrant basher of them all, Donald Trump, at his Mar-a-Lago club and his golf courses.

In fact, the Miami Herald has reported on a secret deal in which the agriculture industry and senators from both parties agreed behind closed doors to fast-track the sanctuary city bill while sidelining a bill that would mandate E-Verify.

It's a cynical political sleight-of-hand: Make a passionate display of passing a symbolic measure, while killing a bill that might actually curb the flow of people living here without legal status but which would threaten an economy that's heavily dependent on a low-paid immigrant workforce.

Gruters insists that his motivations are all about fostering respect for the law. "This should not be about race; this is about protecting the rule of law in our country," he told GateHouse's Zac Anderson. "I don't want to deal with anybody who has hate in their heart and in my brief interactions with these guys they've never said anything hateful."

Willful blindness to white nationalism is not a good look for Florida. It should be condemned at every turn by every elected official.

And every Floridian should recognize the rush to enact anti-sanctuary-city legislation for the sham that it is.